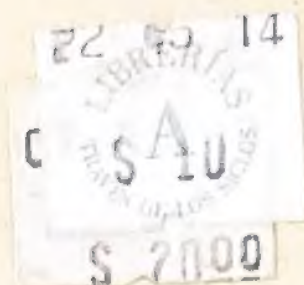


An anthology OF ENTERTAINING
READING...SELECTED EXCLUSIVELY
FOR THE GUESTS OF THE HILTON HOTELS

THE
Hilton
Bedside
Book



This book is loaned to you to provide entertaining reading while you remain our guest. If you would like to take a copy with you when you depart, please notify the room clerk and he will supply you with a fresh copy and add to your bill the nominal charge of one dollar.



THE *Hilton* BEDSIDE BOOK

THE
Hilton
BEDSIDE
BOOK

A TREASURY OF *Entertaining Reading*
SELECTED EXCLUSIVELY
FOR THE GUESTS OF THE *Hilton Hotels*

PUBLISHED BY *Hilton Hotels Corporation*

PROPERTY OF THE PLAZA HOTEL

PUBLISHED BY
Hilton Hotels Corporation
THE CONRAD HILTON, CHICAGO 5, ILLINOIS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the copyright owners for permission to reprint the following stories and articles:

- "The Most Dangerous Game," copyright, 1924, by Richard Connell.
"Jeff Peters as a Personal Magnet," from *The Gentle Grafter*, by O. Henry, copyright, 1908, by Doubleday & Co., Inc.
"Blackmail," by Allan Vaughan Elston, copyright, 1949, by The Crowell-Collier Publishing Co. Permission to reprint granted by Paul R. Reynolds & Son, 599 Fifth Ave., New York 17, N.Y.
"Sense of Humor," from *Money From Home*, by Damon Runyon, copyright, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, by Damon Runyon. Published by J. B. Lippincott Co.
"Uncle Fred Flits By," from *Young Man in Spats*, by P. G. Wodehouse, copyright, 1935, by Pelham Granville Wodehouse. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Co., Inc., the author, and the author's agent, Scott Meredith.
"Summit of the World: The Fight for Everest," condensed from Chapter 10 of *High Conquest*, copyright, 1941, by James Ramsey Ullman. Published by J. B. Lippincott Co.
"The Two-Gun Man," copyright, 1907, by Doubleday & Co., Inc., and copyright, 1935, by Stewart Edward White.
"Moonlight Sonata," from *The Portable Woolcott*, copyright, 1934, by Alexander Woolcott, 1946, by The Viking Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc., New York.
"Mister Million," by Hannibal Coons, copyright, 1950, by The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company.
"The Adventure of the Invisible Man," from *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*, copyright, 1933, 1934, by Ellery Queen. Reprinted by permission of the author.
"The Baby in the Icebox," copyright, 1932, by James M. Cain. Reprinted by permission of the author.
"The Mock Governor," from *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, copyright, 1945, 1946, 1948, 1950, 1951, by Max Shulman. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Co., Inc.
"The Price of the Head," by John Russell, copyright, 1916, by P. F. Collier & Son.
"Wine on the Desert," by Max Brand, copyright, 1936, by Frederick Faust.
"The Lure of the Limerick," by Louis Untermeyer, copyright, 1946, by *Good House-keeping*. Reprinted by permission of the author.
"Remember the Night," by Day Keene, copyright, 1941, by Popular Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author.
"The Skipper's Pink Panties," from *All the Ship's at Sea*, copyright, 1950, by William J. Lederer. Reprinted by permission of William Sloane Associates, Inc.
"Mouse," by Frederic Brown, copyright by Standard Magazines, Inc., for *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, June, 1949.

COPYRIGHT, 1952, BY EDITORIAL PROJECTS,
270 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

THIS BOOK has one simple purpose—to help make every moment of your visit with us enjoyable.

The Hilton Bedside Book is vacation reading. It is not Great Literature—but some of it is memorable, and all of it is, we hope, enjoyable. It is a collection of short pieces, for casual reading—to provide pleasurable filler for those odd moments before retiring, or before dinner, or perhaps between engagements.

We think you will find here reading for almost every mood: excitement and adventure—and the relaxing therapy of light humor. Here are westerns and detective stories, and tales of the South Seas, for thrills, and here is lightning and enlightening wit to ease the tension of a busy day.

The Hilton Bedside Book has been prepared exclusively for the guests of the Hilton hotels because no one book or group of books could possibly satisfy a variety of reading tastes. In this varied anthology, we hope, every guest will find at least a measure of entertainment.

CONRAD N. HILTON, PRESIDENT

Contents

| | | |
|----------------------|--|----|
| RICHARD CONNELL | The Most Dangerous Game <i>(One of the most thrilling chase stories ever written)</i> | 13 |
| O. HENRY | Jeff Peters as a Personal Magnet <i>(Dr. Waugh-hoo's Resurrec- tion Bitters—only 50¢ a bottle)</i> | 30 |
| ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON | Blackmail <i>(If you were the candidate, what would you do?)</i> | 37 |
| DAMON RUNYON | Sense of Humor <i>(Mayhem à la Runyon)</i> | 54 |
| P. G. WODEHOUSE | Uncle Fred Flits By <i>(Generally acclaimed to be his funniest)</i> | 64 |
| JAMES R. ULLMAN | Summit of the World: The Fight for Everest <i>(Men against the world's high- est mountain)</i> | 84 |

Contents

| | | |
|----------------------|--|-----|
| STEWART EDWARD WHITE | The Two-Gun Man <i>(A Western with a twist in the tale)</i> | 100 |
| ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT | Moonlight Sonata <i>(NOT for bedtime reading)</i> | 113 |
| HANNIBAL COONS | Mister Million <i>(From Collier's funniest fiction series)</i> | 117 |
| ELLERY QUEEN | The Adventure of The Invisible Lover <i>(The reader has all the clues)</i> | 133 |
| JAMES M. CAIN | The Baby in the Icebox <i>(Three men, one woman and a tiger: result—explosion)</i> | 154 |
| MAX SHULMAN | The Mock Governor <i>(The campus humorist at his daffiest)</i> | 172 |
| JOHN RUSSELL | The Price of the Head <i>(Literally, a hair-curler in the Pacific)</i> | 187 |
| MAX BRAND | Wine on the Desert <i>(The posse wasn't his only enemy)</i> | 200 |
| LOUIS UNTERMAYER | The Lure of the Limerick <i>(One of the most universal pastimes—slightly bowdlerized)</i> | 209 |

Contents

| | | |
|--------------------|---|-----|
| DAY KEENE | Remember the Night <i>(Prize mystery of the hard-boiled school)</i> | 218 |
| WILLIAM J. LEDERER | The Skipper's Pink Panties <i>(The Ensign carries out his mission)</i> | 235 |
| FREDRIC BROWN | Mouse <i>(What happened when the spaceship landed in Central Park)</i> | 243 |

THE *Hilton* BEDSIDE BOOK

RICHARD CONNELL

The Most Dangerous Game

THERE WAS NO SOUND in the night as Rainsford sat there but the muffled throb of the engine that drove the yacht swiftly through the darkness, and the swish and ripple of the wash of the propeller. Rainsford, reclining in a steamer chair, indolently puffed on his favorite brier. "It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids—"

An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times. Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the reports had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; a short, hoarse cry came from his lips as he realized he had reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the

yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. A certain cool-headedness had come to him; it was not the first time he had been in a tight place. There was a chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht, but that chance was slender, and grew more slender as the yacht raced on. He wrestled himself out of his clothes, and shouted with all his power. The lights of the yacht became faint and ever-vanishing fireflies; then they were blotted out entirely by the night.

Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and doggedly he swam in that direction, swimming with slow, deliberate strokes, conserving his strength. For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more, he thought, and then—

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high, screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror. He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another noise, crisp, staccato.

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes of determined effort brought another sound to his ears—the most welcome he had ever heard—the muttering and growling of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He was almost on the rocks before he saw them; on a night less calm he would have been shattered against them. With his remaining strength he dragged himself from the swirling waters. Gasping, his hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. Dense jungle came down to the very edge of the cliffs. What perils that tangle of trees and underbrush might hold for him did not concern Rainsford just then. All he knew was that he was safe from his enemy, the sea, and that utter weariness was on him. He flung himself down at the jungle edge and tumbled headlong into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigor; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked about him, almost cheerfully.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled and ragged jungle fringed the shore.

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he had landed, he stopped. Some wounded thing, by the evidence a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down and the moss was lacerated; one patch of weeds was stained crimson. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford's eye and he picked it up. It was an empty cartridge.

"A twenty-two," he remarked. "That's odd. It must have been a fairly large animal, too. The hunter had his nerve with him to tackle it with a light gun. It's clear that the brute put up a fight."

He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find—the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along, now slipping on a rotten log or a loose stone, but making headway; night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them as he turned a crook in the coast line, and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he forged his way along he saw to his astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous building—a lofty structure with pointed towers plunging upward into the gloom. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial château; it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

"Mirage," thought Rainsford. But it was no mirage, he found, when he opened the tall spiked iron gate. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet about it all hung an air of unreality. He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard steps within; the door remained

closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker, and let it fall. The door opened then, opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring, and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of glaring gold light that poured out. The first thing his eyes discerned was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen—a gigantic creature, solidly made and black-bearded to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barreled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart. Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

"Don't be alarmed," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming. "I'm no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City."

The menacing look in the eyes did not change. The revolver pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in uniform, a black uniform trimmed with gray astrakhan.

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a yacht. I am hungry."

The man's only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man's free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in evening clothes. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand. In a cultivated voice marked by a slight accent that gave it added precision and deliberateness, he said: "It is a very great pleasure and honor to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home. I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military mustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheek bones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat. Turning to

the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his pistol, saluted, withdrew.

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack," said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I."

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be chatting here. We can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot. Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford. I was about to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge beam-ceiling bedroom with a canopied bed big enough for six men that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor who ordinarily cut and sewed for none below the rank of duke.

The dining room to which Ivan conducted him was in many ways remarkable. It suggested a baronial hall of feudal times with its oaken panels, its high ceiling, its vast refectory table where two score men could sit down to eat. About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. The table appointments were of the finest—the linen, the crystal, the silver, the china.

Half apologetically General Zaroff said: "We do our best to preserve the amenities of civilization here. Please forgive any lapses. We are well off the beaten track, you know."

The general seemed a most thoughtful and affable host, a true cosmopolite. But whenever he looked up from his plate Rainsford found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly.

"Perhaps," said General Zaroff, "you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting published in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt."

"You have some wonderful heads here," said Rainsford. "That

Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw. I've always thought that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game."

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling his curious red-lipped smile. Then he said slowly: "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game." He sipped his wine. "Here in my preserve on this island," he said, in the same slow tone, "I hunt more dangerous game."

Rainsford expressed his surprise. "Is there big game on this island?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course, I have to stock the island."

"What have you imported, General?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford. We will have some capital hunting, you and I. I shall be most glad to have your society."

"But what game—" began Rainsford.

"I'll tell you," said the general. "You will be amused, I know. I think I may say, in all modesty, that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation."

The general continued: "God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow for me, to shoot sparrows with. I killed my first bear when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed.

"After the debacle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Tsar to stay there. Luckily, I had invested heavily in American securities, so I shall never have to open a tea room in Monte Carlo or drive a taxi in Paris. Naturally, I continued to hunt—grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodiles in the Ganges, rhinoceroses in East Africa. I went to the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard that they were unusually cunning.

They weren't." The Cossack sighed. "They were no match at all for a hunter with his wits about him, and a high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting, remember, had been my life. I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. You are much younger than I am, Mr. Rainsford, and have not hunted as much, but you perhaps can guess the answer."

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call 'a sporting proposition.' It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette. "No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this it was a tragic moment for me, I tell you."

Rainsford leaned across the table, absorbed in what his host was saying.

"It came to me as an inspiration what I must do," the general went on.

"And that was?"

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said.

"A new animal? You're joking."

"Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps—"

"But the animal, General Zaroff?"

"Oh," said the general, "it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits."

Rainsford's bewilderment showed in his face.

"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So

I said: 'What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?' And the answer was, of course: 'It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.'"

"But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "there is one that can."

"But you can't mean—" gasped Rainsford.

"And why not?"

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke."

"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."

"Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder."

The general laughed. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. "I refuse to believe that so modern a man harbors romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war—"

"Did not make me condone cold-blooded murder," finished Rainsford, stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. "How extraordinarily droll you are!" he said. "One does not expect nowadays to find a young man of the educated class, even in America, with such a naive, and, if I may say so, mid-Victorian point of view. It's like finding a snuff-box in a limousine. I'll wager you'll forget your notions when you go hunting with me. You've a genuine new thrill in store for you, Mr. Rainsford."

"Thank you, I'm a hunter, not a murderer."

"Dear me," said the general, quite unruffled, "again that unpleasant word. But I think I can show you that your scruples are quite ill-founded."

"Yes?"

"Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my gift? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt the scum of the earth—sailors from tramp ships—lascars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels—a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them."

"But where do you get them?"

"This island is called Ship Trap," he answered. "Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes, when Providence is not so kind, I help Providence a bit. Come to the window with me.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. As the general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none: giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said, casually, as if in answer to a question, "I have electricity. We try to be civilized here."

"Civilized? And you shoot down men?"

A trace of anger was in the general's black eyes, but it was there for but a second, and he said, in his most pleasant manner: "Dear me, what a righteous young man you are! That would be barbarous. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. They're from the Spanish bark *Sanlucar* that had the bad luck to go on the rocks out there. A very inferior lot, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to the deck than to the jungle."

He raised his hand, and Ivan brought thick Turkish coffee. Rainsford, with an effort, held his tongue in check.

"It's a game, you see," pursued the general, blandly. "I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. I am to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest caliber and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him"—the general smiled—"he loses."

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

"Oh," said the general, "I give him his option, of course. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honor of serving as official knouter to the Great White Tsar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt."

"And if they win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost," he said. Then he added, hastily, "I don't wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. Occasionally I strike a tartar. One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs."

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering illumination that made grotesque patterns on the courtyard below, and Rainsford could see moving about there a dozen or so huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their eyes glittered greenly.

"A rather good lot, I think," observed the general. "They are let out at seven every night. If anyone should try to get into my house—or out of it—something extremely regrettable would occur to him." He hummed a snatch of song.

"And now," said the general, "I want to show you my new collection of heads. Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford, "that you will excuse me tonight, General. I'm really not feeling at all well."

"Ah, indeed?" the general inquired, solicitously. "Well, I suppose that's only natural, after your long swim. Tomorrow, you'll feel like a new man, I'll wager. Then we'll hunt, eh? I've one rather promising prospect—"

Rainsford was hurrying from the room.

"Sorry you can't go with me tonight," called the general. "I expect rather fair sport—a big, strong black. He looks resourceful—. Well, good night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fiber of his being, but nevertheless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor out-

side his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the château were out now and it was dark and silent, but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its light he could see, dimly, the courtyard; there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol.

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint. The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. It's most annoying."

"General," said Rainsford, firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting—"

"I wish to go today," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff's face suddenly brightened.

"Tonight," said the general, "we will hunt—you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, General," he said. "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan's?"

"You don't mean—" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel—at last."

The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said, enthusiastically. "Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. And the stake is not without value, eh?"

"And if I win—" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff. "My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town. I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course, you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case—but why discuss that now?" Then a business-like air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We called it Death Swamp. There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable part of it was that Lazarus followed him. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You'll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? Au revoir, Mr. Rainsford, au revoir."

General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room. From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a haversack of food, a leather sheath containing a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a cocked revolver thrust in the crimson sash about his waist.

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said, through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear-headed when the château gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, and to this end, he had plunged along, spurred on by panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped, and was taking stock of himself and the situation.

He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. "I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford, and he struck off from the rude path he had been following into the trackless wilderness.

He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again, recalling all the lore of the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him leg-weary with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a thickly wooded ridge. A big tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches was near by, and taking care to leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and stretching out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so zealous a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that complicated trail through the jungle after dark.

Toward morning, when a dingy gray was varnishing the sky the cry of some startled bird focused Rainsford's attention. Something was coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb, and through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. The thing that was approaching was a man.

It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees, and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic—a small automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground

and were traveling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come. Swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could follow an extremely difficult trail; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back? Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree, and struck off again into the woods. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding bough that was the trigger. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell;

he staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear again gripping his heart, heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

"Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. Luckily for me, I too have hunted in Malacca. You are proving of interest, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it's only a slight one. But I shall be back. I shall be back."

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate, hopeless flight. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins; the vegetation grew ranker, denser; insects bit him savagely. Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot. With a violent effort he tore his foot loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand. The softness of the earth gave him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so and began to dig. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew his pursuer was coming; he heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. Rainsford, crouching there, lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. He leaped up from his place of concealment. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with an electric torch in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has claimed one of my best dogs. Again you score. I think, Mr. Rainsford, I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was the baying of a pack of hounds. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

The baying of the hounds drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. On a ridge Rainsford climbed a tree. Down a water-course, not a quarter of a mile away, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes, he saw the lean figure of General Zaroff; just ahead of him, Rainsford made out another figure whose wide shoulders surged through the tall jungle weeds; it was the giant Ivan, holding the pack in leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped, too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back, but the hope in his brain died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not wholly failed.

Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the château. Twenty feet be-

low him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask, and hummed a bit from "Madame Butterfly."

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great paneled dining hall that evening. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him. In his library he read, to soothe himself, from the works of Marcus Aurelius. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so before turning on his light he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and called: "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed was standing there.

"Rainsford!" cried the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . ."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

O. HENRY

Jeff Peters as a Personal Magnet

JEFF PETERS has been engaged in as many schemes for making money as there are recipes for cooking rice in Charleston, S. C.

Best of all I like to hear him tell of his earlier days when he sold liniments and cough cures on street corners, living hand to mouth, heart to heart with the people, throwing heads or tails with fortune for his last coin.

I struck Fisher Hill, Arkansaw (said he) in buckskin suit, moccasins, long hair and a thirty-carat diamond ring that I got from an actor in Texarkana. I don't know what he ever did with the pocket knife I swapped him for it.

I was Dr. Waugh-hoo, the celebrated Indian medicine man. I carried only one best bet just then, and that was Resurrection Bitters. It was made of life-giving plants and herbs accidentally discovered by Ta-qua-la, the beautiful wife of the chief of the Choctaw Nation, while gathering truck to garnish a platter of boiled dog for the annual corn dance.

Business hadn't been good at the last town, so I only had five dollars. I went to the Fisher Hill druggist and he credited me for a half gross of eight ounce bottles and corks. I had the labels and ingredients in my valise, left over from the last town. Life began to look rosy again after I got in my hotel room with the water run-

ning from the tap, and the Resurrection Bitters lining up on the table by the dozen.

Fake? No, sir. There was two dollars' worth of fluid extract of cinchona and a dime's worth of aniline in that half-gross of bitters. I've gone through towns years afterwards and had folks ask for 'em again.

I hired a wagon that night and commenced selling the bitters on Main Street. Fisher Hill was a low, malarial town; and a compound hypothetical pneumo-cardiac anti-scorbutic tonic was just what I diagnosed the crowd as needing. The bitters started off like sweetbreads-on-toast at a vegetarian dinner. I had sold two dozen at fifty cents apiece when I felt somebody pull my coat tail. I knew what that meant; so I climbed down and sneaked a five-dollar bill into the hand of a man with a German silver star on his lapel.

"Constable," says I, "it's a fine night."

"Have you got a city license," he asks, "to sell this illegitimate essence of spooju that you flatter by the name of medicine?"

"I have not," says I. "I didn't know you had a city. If I can find it tomorrow I'll take one out if it's necessary."

"I'll have to close you up till you do," says the constable.

I quit selling and went back to the hotel. I was talking to the landlord about it.

"Oh, you won't stand no show in Fisher Hill," says he. "Dr. Hoskins, the only doctor here, is a brother-in-law of the Mayor, and they won't allow no fake doctors to practice in town."

"I don't practice medicine," says I, "I've got a State peddler's license, and I take out a city one wherever they demand it."

I went to the Mayor's office the next morning and they told me he hadn't showed up yet. They didn't know when he'd be down. So Doc Waugh-hoo hunches down again in a hotel chair and lights a jimpson-weed regalia, and waits.

By and by a young man in a blue necktie slips into the chair next to me and asks the time.

"Half-past ten," says I, "and you are Andy Tucker. I've seen you work. Wasn't it you that put up the Great Cupid Combination package on the Southern States? Let's see, it was a Chilian dia-

mond engagement ring, a wedding ring, a potato masher, a bottle of soothing syrup and Dorothy Vernon—all for fifty cents.”

Andy was pleased to hear that I remembered him. He was a good street man; and he was more than that—he respected his profession, and he was satisfied with 300 per cent profit. He had plenty of offers to go into the illegitimate drug and garden seed business; but he was never to be tempted off of the straight path.

I wanted a partner, so Andy and me agreed to go out together. I told him about the situation on Fisher Hill and how finances was low on account of the local mixture of politics and jalap. Andy had just got in on the train that morning. He was pretty low himself, and was going to canvass the town for a few dollars to build a new battleship by popular subscription at Eureka Springs. So we went out and sat on the porch and talked it over.

The next morning at eleven o'clock when I was sitting there alone, an Uncle Tom shuffles into the hotel and asked the doctor to come and see Judge Banks, who, it seems, was the mayor and a mighty sick man.

“I’m no doctor,” says I. “Why don’t you go and get the doctor?”

“Boss,” says he. “Doc Hoskin am done gone twenty miles in the country to see some sick persons. He’s de only doctor in de town, and Massa Banks am powerful bad off. He sent me to ax you to please, suh, come.”

“As man to man,” says I, “I’ll go and look him over.” So I put a bottle of Resurrection Bitters in my pocket and goes up on the hill to the mayor’s mansion, the finest house in town, with a mansard roof and two cast-iron dogs on the lawn.

This Mayor Banks was in bed all but his whiskers and feet. He was making internal noises that would have had everybody in San Francisco hiking for the parks. A young man was standing by the bed holding a cup of water.

“Doc,” says the Mayor, “I’m awful sick. I’m about to die. Can’t you do nothing for me?”

“Mr. Mayor,” says I, “I’m not a regular preordained disciple of S. Q. Lapius, I never took a course in a medical college,” says I. “I’ve just come as a fellow man to see if I could be of any assistance.”

"I'm deeply obliged," says he. "Doc Waugh-hoo, this is my nephew, Mr. Biddle. He has tried to alleviate my distress, but without success. Oh, Lordy! Ow-ow-ow!" he sings out.

I nods at Mr. Biddle and sets down by the bed and feels the mayor's pulse. "Let me see your liver—your tongue, I mean," says I. Then I turns up the lids of his eyes and looks close at the pupils of 'em.

"How long have you been sick?" I asked.

"I was taken down—ow-ouch—last night," says the Mayor. "Gimme something for it, doc, won't you?"

"Mr. Fiddle," says I, "raise the window shade a bit, will you?"

"Biddle," says the young man. "Do you feel like you could eat some ham and eggs, Uncle James?"

"Mr. Mayor," says I, after laying my ear to his right shoulder blade and listening, "you've got a bad attack of super-inflammation of the right clavicle of the harpsichord!"

"Good Lord!" says he, with a groan. "Can't you rub something on it, or set it or anything?"

I picks up my hat and starts for the door.

"You ain't going, doc?" says the Mayor with a howl. "You ain't going away and leave me to die with this—superfluity of the clapboards, are you?"

"Common humanity, Dr. Whoa-ha," says Mr. Biddle, "ought to prevent your deserting a fellow-human in distress."

"Dr. Waugh-hoo, when you get through plowing," says I. And then I walks back to the bed and throws back my long hair.

"Mr. Mayor," says I, "there is only one hope for you. Drugs will do you no good. But there is another power higher yet, although drugs are high enough," says I.

"And what is that?" says he.

"Scientific demonstrations," says I. "The triumph of mind over sarsaparilla. The belief that there is no pain and sickness except what is produced when we ain't feeling well. Declare yourself in arrears. Demonstrate."

"What is this paraphernalia you speak of, Doc?" says the Mayor.

"You ain't a Socialist, are you?"

"I am speaking," says I, "of the great doctrine of psychic finan-

ciering—of the enlightened school of long-distance, sub-conscientious treatment of fallacies and meningitis—of that wonderful indoor sport known as personal magnetism.”

“Can you work it, Doc?” asks the Mayor.

“I’m one of the Sole Sanhedrims and Ostensible Hooplas of the Inner Pulpit,” says I. “The lame talk and the blind rubber whenever I make a pass at ’em. I am a medium, a coloratura hypnotist and a spirituous control. It was only through me at the recent seances at Ann Arbor that the late president of the Vinegar Bitters Company could revisit the earth to communicate with his sister Jane. You see me peddling medicine on the streets,” says I, “to the poor. I don’t practice personal magnetism on them. I do not drag it in the dust,” says I, “because they haven’t got the dust.”

“Will you treat my case?” asks the Mayor.

“Listen,” says I. “I’ve had a good deal of trouble with medical societies everywhere I’ve been. I don’t practice medicine. But, to save your life, I’ll give you the psychic treatment if you’ll agree as mayor not to push the license question.”

“Of course I will,” says he. “And now get to work, Doc, for them pains are coming on again.”

“My fee will be \$250.00 cure guaranteed in two treatments,” says I.

“All right,” says the Mayor. “I’ll pay it. I guess my life’s worth that much.”

I sat down by the bed and looked him straight in the eye.

“Now,” says I, “get your mind off the disease. You ain’t sick. You haven’t got a heart or a clavicle or a funny bone or brains or anything. You haven’t got any pain. Declare error. Now you feel the pain that you didn’t have leaving, don’t you?”

“I do feel some little better, Doc,” says the Mayor, “darned if I don’t. Now state a few lies about my not having this swelling in my left side, and I think I could be propped up and have some sausage and buckwheat cakes.”

I made a few passes with my hands.

“Now,” says I, “the inflammation’s gone. The right lobe of the perihelion has subsided. You’re getting sleepy. You can’t hold

your eyes open any longer. For the present the disease is checked. Now, you are asleep."

The Mayor shut his eyes slowly and began to snore.

"You observe, Mr. Tiddle," says I, "the wonders of modern science."

"Biddle," says he. "When will you give uncle the rest of the treatment, Dr. Pooh-pooh?"

"Waugh-hoo," says I. "I'll come back at eleven to-morrow. When he wakes up give him eight drops of turpentine and three pounds of steak. Good morning."

The next morning I went back on time. "Well, Mr. Riddle," says I, when he opened the bedroom door, "and how is uncle this morning?"

"He seems much better," says the young man.

The Mayor's color and pulse was fine. I gave him another treatment, and he said the last of the pain left him.

"Now," says I, "you'd better stay in bed for a day or two, and you'll be all right. It's a good thing I happened to be in Fisher Hill, Mr. Mayor," says I, "for all the remedies in the cornucopia that the regular schools of medicine use couldn't have saved you. And now that error has flew and pain proved a perjurer, let's allude to a cheerfuller subject— say the fee of \$250.00. No checks, please, I hate to write my name on the back of a check almost as bad as I do on the front."

"I've got the cash here," says the Mayor, pulling a pocket book from under his pillow.

He counts out five fifty-dollar notes and holds 'em in his hand.

"Bring the receipt," he says to Biddle.

I signed the receipt and the Mayor handed me the money. I put it in my inside pocket careful.

"Now do your duty, officer," says the Mayor, grinning much unlike a sick man.

Mr. Biddle lays his hand on my arm.

"You're under arrest, Dr. Waugh-hoo, alias Peters," says he, "for practising medicine without authority under the State law."

"Who are you?" I asks.

"I'll tell you who he is," says the Mayor, sitting up in bed. "He's a detective employed by the State Medical Society. He's been following you over five counties. He came to me yesterday and we fixed up this scheme to catch you. I guess you won't do any more doctoring around these parts, Mr. Fakir. What was it you said I had, Doc?" the Mayor laughs, "compound—well it wasn't softening of the brain, I guess, anyway."

"A detective," says I.

"Correct," says Biddle. "I'll have to turn you over to the sheriff."

"Let's see you do it," says I, and I grabs Biddle by the throat and half throws him out the window, but he pulls a gun and sticks it under my chin, and I stand still. Then he puts handcuffs on me, and takes the money out of my pocket.

"I witness," says he, "that they're the same bills that you and I marked, Judge Banks. I'll turn them over to the sheriff when we get to his office, and he'll send you a receipt. They'll have to be used as evidence in the case."

"All right, Mr. Biddle," says the Mayor. "And now, Doc Waugh-hoo," he goes on, "why don't you demonstrate? Can't you pull the cork out of your magnetism with your teeth and hocus-pocus them handcuffs off?"

"Come on, officer," says I, dignified. "I may as well make the best of it." And then I turns to old Banks and rattles my chains.

"Mr. Mayor," says I, "the time will come soon when you'll believe that personal magnetism is a success. And you'll be sure that it succeeded in this case, too."

And I guess it did.

When we got nearly to the gate, I says: "We might meet somebody now, Andy. I reckon you better take 'em off, and—" Hey? Why, of course it was Andy Tucker. That was his scheme; and that's how we got the capital to go into business together.

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

Blackmail

THE WOMAN WAS BLONDE and attractively thirtyish. Her suit, handbag, and hat matched, rather startlingly, in a pale shade of green. She appeared at midnight at the Fowler Street taxi stand.

"Where to, lady?" the cab dispatcher asked.

"4422 Heliotrope Drive."

The dispatcher scribbled on his call sheet: "4422 Heliotrope; 12:01 A.M." He said to the fare, "Sit down and wait, lady. Be a cab here in a minute."

Only a few cabs operated from the stand after midnight. Shortly one of them drew up. The dispatcher called, "Take the lady to 4422 Heliotrope, Ed."

The woman got in and was driven to the address. It was in a moderately fashionable district and the house, at this hour, was unlighted. The woman got out, paid and tipped the driver. "You needn't wait," she told him.

She took three steps up the lawn walk, then stopped to fumble in her bag, as though for a latchkey. This gave the cab time to drive away. When it was out of sight she turned and walked rapidly up the street, not stopping until she arrived at her own apartment, a mile away.

A night later, at the same hour, she again appeared at the Fowler Street taxi stand. Again she taxied to 4422 Heliotrope Drive. Again, once the cab was out of sight, she walked directly home.

She repeated the operation on thirteen successive nights.

But on the fourteenth night she arrived at the taxi stand five hours early. Twilight hadn't yet faded. Again she was driven to 4422 Heliotrope. This time, after getting out, she was awkward in passing the tip, and the coin dropped on the cab floor. Searching for it delayed the cabman's departure long enough for the woman to reach the house porch and ring the bell.

John Norman heard his front door chimes ring just as his living-room clock struck seven. He was alone in the house. His wife had been out of town for two weeks, but was due home tomorrow. They hadn't needed a servant since Judy, their teen-age daughter, had gone away to boarding school.

John went to the door, opened it, and confronted a woman he'd never seen before. She was slim and blonde and green-eyed.

"I'm afraid I'm lost." She spoke in a tone of embarrassed apology. "May I look up an address in your phone book? I'm late for a dinner party somewhere in this neighborhood. I thought it was in this block, but—"

"Help yourself," John Norman broke in heartily. "The same thing happened to me once." He stood aside to let her come in. "The telephone's right in that alcove."

"Thank you so much." She went to the alcove, picked up the phone book, and began thumbing through it.

When she emerged she smiled gratefully. "I got the address from the book. It's not far. Thank you."

Then John Norman became aware that she was staring ruefully at smudges on her finger tips. It looked like garden mud. A similar smudge was on her handbag.

"Now, where," she exclaimed in dismay, "did I get that?"

He presumed she'd dropped the bag in crossing the lawn. Stopping to pick it up, she could have soiled her fingers.

"Which means I have to go clear back home." Her lips drooped in chagrin. "And I'm late already." She took a step toward the door, then turned to him appealingly: "Unless you'd let me scrub it off right here! Would you? It wouldn't take but a minute."

"Sure," John agreed cordially. "The powder-room's right there." He pointed to a door at the back of the hall.

"I'm sorry to be such a nuisance." She went back and disappeared into the powder-room.

John Norman heard the tap running and the faint sounds of scrubbing. In a few minutes she came out. "You've been awfully kind. Thanks again," she said.

She left the house. John Norman heard her heels click to the street walk. He dismissed her from his mind.

It was a busy mind. Currently the youngest and most energetic mayor in the history of this city, at the coming election John Norman was running for Congress. . . .

In the morning he drove to the airport to meet his wife. Edith Norman uptilted her small dark face to be kissed. "I hope you've been lonesome every minute, darling," she said.

"Every minute," he assured her.

Edith had warm brown eyes and looked younger than most women of thirty-five. She was fiercely proud of her husband. A year from now they'd be living in Washington.

"I didn't forget to water the geraniums," John boasted. "And I sent Judy her allowance."

After taking Edith home he drove directly to his City Hall office. The day was filled with hearings, dictations, conferences, and the endless petitions likely to be born in a city of 200,000 people. Strings pulling first this way, then that. It was late afternoon before John found time for a huddle with Pete Delby, who was managing the congressional campaign. With Delby he formulated an answer to a charge made in J. Harrison Hardesty's opposition paper, the *Clarion*.

John was home by six, tired and hungry.

Edith met him at the door. "Why didn't you tell me you had a party while I was gone?" she chided him.

"I didn't."

"Then how did this"—Edith held up a solid gold compact with the initials "CG" on it—"get into the powder-room?"

John hefted it curiously. "If gold's worth thirty-five an ounce, this must have set somebody back real dough. In the powder-room, you say?"

"It wasn't there," Edith said, "when I went away two weeks ago."

Then he remembered. "A woman," he explained, "came in to use the phone. She had mud on her fingers—"

"Begin at the beginning, please. What woman? She's a blonde. I can tell from the powder."

John gave every detail he could recall.

"Where," Edith questioned, "was the dinner party?"

"What dinner party?"

"The one she was on her way to when she got lost."

"How would I know?"

Edith looked thoughtful all through supper. Later she scanned the society page of the evening paper, line by line. "It doesn't mention any party last night in this neighborhood."

John settled back comfortably with his pipe. "So what. Lots of small, informal dinners don't get into the papers. The only funny thing is—why hasn't she come back for it? That gold compact."

"Maybe she has."

The constraint in Edith's voice made John look up. "You mean she did? Then why didn't you give it back to her?"

"I mean," Edith told him, "that twice today the telephone rang. I answered it each time. There was a pause. Followed by a faint feminine murmur: 'Sorry; wrong number.' Then a click as she hung up."

John shrugged. "People call wrong numbers all the time. Feel like taking in a show, Edie?"

She didn't.

It hardly began to strike John Norman as anything serious until he came home from the office an evening later. Edith didn't meet him at the door. He found her in the sun parlor looking very tense.

"CG called up again," she informed him.

"You mean Green-Eyes? What did she say?"

"When she heard *my* voice answer she purred, as usual, 'Sorry; wrong number.'"

John reddened. "See here, Edie. We've been married fifteen

years. Don't you trust me? You think Green-Eyes is waiting to hear *my* voice answer the phone and then say, 'Hide that compact before your wife finds it'?"

Tears welled in Edith's eyes. She turned impulsively to John and put her arms around him. "She *wants* me to think that. Don't you see? If she were really trying to get in touch with you she'd call you at your office. Not at home in the daytime, where your wife's almost sure to answer. Then, by stealthily hanging up, she makes herself sound guilty and mysterious."

It was a sobering thought. "It could be a smear trick," John said.

"Of course it could. You're running for Congress. She'd know from the society pages just when I left town, and for how long. If she could make me accuse you of having an affair while I was away, and it got into the papers—"

"But you're *not* accusing me. And it won't get into the papers. Anyway, the whole thing's fantastic. I know my opponent, Lamson, wouldn't stand for a trick like that. Neither would J. Harrison Hardesty, who's backing him. Now, how about dinner, honey?"

At ten in the morning the secretary who screened John Norman's appointments said, "A Miss Clara Grant is on telephone number two, Mr. Norman. She says it's personal."

The initials on the compact leaped into John's mind. "I'll take it," he said tersely.

The voice on the phone spoke in the same tone of embarrassed apology he remembered: "I may have left my compact at your house the other evening, Mr. Norman. Did you happen to find it?"

"I found a gold compact with 'CG' on it."

"Thank heaven!" she said. "I was afraid I'd left it in a taxicab."

"Did you try to get me at my house?"

"Oh, no. It just this minute occurred to me I might have left it there."

"If you'll give me your address, Miss Grant, I'll see that you get it."

"Thank you so much. It's Apartment 1, 3306 Fowler."

She hung up, and John chuckled. So much for Edie's witch-hunt suspicions! Trying to make something out of nothing. Clearly, Clara Grant was quite on the level.

But when he rang his wife to assure her of it, Edith was still doubtful: "Promise me you'll have someone check on her, John."

To please her, John promised. He sent for Dave Marcum, one of the abler plainclothes men on the city force.

Dave came in quietly and sat down. John gave him the known facts. "Now look, Dave. My wife suspects the compact was planted to smear me. I don't think so, but let's play it safe. I want you to go to 3306 Fowler, and find some excuse to talk to Miss Grant in Apartment 1. Size her up. Inquire around the neighborhood and make sure she's on the up-and-up. Find out if she has any political connections."

Dave Marcum's report, six hours later, dispelled the last shadow of apprehension in John's mind:

"Don't give it another thought, Mr. Norman. She *owns* that apartment building. It's a six-unit walk-up. She occupies one unit and lives off the rent from the other five. Crooks hardly ever own real estate. It keeps them from fading when they have to. As for politics, nobody in politics ever heard of this dame."

John hurried home to reassure Edith.

He didn't quite succeed. "I've still got my fingers crossed," she said stubbornly.

He took her in his arms. "But why?"

"Because I don't trust green-eyed blondes who borrow a married man's bathroom and then make pussyfooting calls to his wife."

John laughed. He pinched Edie's cheek and went to his den to work on the campaign speech he was to give the following night at Arlington.

Arlington was in a far corner of the congressional district. John caught a late afternoon train and went back to the parlor car. After making himself comfortable he closed his eyes and began mentally rehearsing his speech.

A voice startled him: "We can talk quietly here, Mr. Norman."

The blonde with the green eyes! Clara Grant. She had come into the car and taken the next chair.

"Well, Miss Grant," John said, "this is a surprise. I'm sorry I've not had a chance to return your compact. I planned—"

"That's not what I want at the moment," Clara Grant interrupted. Gone from her voice was the tone of apology. The green eyes had a predatory gleam.

"What *do* you want?" John asked cautiously.

"Twenty thousand dollars," she said.

John smiled grimly. "I suppose you also demand that I withdraw from the congressional race?"

"You're quite wrong, Mr. Norman." The rumbling of wheels covered her voice. "I don't care who wins the election. All I want is twenty grand."

"A straight person-to-person shake-down. The answer is no. You've nothing on me. Even if you did have, I wouldn't pay you a dime."

"When you find out everything," she warned, "you may change your mind. If you don't, it'll be quite a shock to your wife."

John flushed. "Who put you up to this?"

"No one. I thought it out all by myself."

The train stopped at a station. In the comparative quiet Clara Grant lighted a cigarette and waited. When wheels began turning again she said, "I went to your house every night your wife was away. Always after midnight, except the last time. Those are the facts, and witnesses can prove them."

"Witnesses?" he asked.

"The witnesses," she asserted, "are all innocent, disinterested, and sincere. Now, about the pay-off, Mr. Norman. I'd rather not accept currency. You might try to trap me with marked bills."

"How else," John probed, "could I pay you twenty thousand?"

"I own the apartment house where I live. It's old and in need of repair, and on the present market won't bring more than fifty thousand. It's mortgaged for exactly that sum. I'm advertising it in the papers for seventy. You buy it for seventy. Which means you simply give me your check for twenty thousand and take title to the encumbered property. All done in the open, Mr. Norman, through any realtor you select."

That way, he saw, she'd be perfectly safe. Nothing to prove this

conversation. If he accused her, it would be merely his word against hers.

"The deadline," she said coolly, "will be six P.M. of the Friday before election."

"I thought you said the election has nothing to do with it."

"The outcome hasn't. But the fact that you're running happens to make you a little more vulnerable."

John seethed. But surely it was just a bluff. How could she prove a series of midnight visits?

"Just what is your threat? If I don't pay before the election, what do you propose to do?"

"The opposition paper, Mr. Harrison Hardesty's *Clarion*," she said, "will receive an anonymous typed note. Apparently, it will come from a disgruntled taxi driver you had a row with one time. Actually, it will come from me. It will suggest that the *Clarion* take a look at the call sheets of the Fowler Street cabstand, with particular attention to a certain consistent midnight customer. The *Clarion* people want to defeat you, Mr. Norman. They'll start digging."

That evening at Arlington, John stumbled through his speech. It was the poorest effort of his career. When it was over he hurried to the station and caught a train back to his home city.

He arrived at midnight and got into a taxi. "Take me," he directed grimly, "to the Fowler Street cabstand."

A sleepy dispatcher was on duty there. He recognized John from campaign pictures in the papers and on billboards.

"I'm trying to check on one of your recent customers," John said. "Mind if I look at your call sheets for the last several weeks?"

"We don't keep a record of names, sir."

"I know. Let me see them, anyway."

The dispatcher pushed a dog-eared book toward John. The entries were in pencil. Each line had a destination and a time of departure. Nothing else.

John thumbed to the first date of Edith's absence from home. An entry said: "4422 Heliotrope; 12:01 A.M." On each of the next twelve nights he found a similar entry. A day later the record said: "4422 Heliotrope; 6:44 P.M."

That was all. He could see that the dispatcher was neither curious nor suspicious. It would be the same with the cabdrivers. To them 4422 Heliotrope was just another house.

But it would be different with smart reporters from the *Clarion*. Tipped to this record, they'd quickly identify the address as John Norman's. They'd question the dispatcher and the cabbies. A consistently repeating fare like Clara Grant would be remembered. They didn't know her name, but the fact of a series of midnight visits by a blonde would be established.

It could be a field day for the opposition and a hard-hitting sheet like the *Clarion*. From the first it had waged a no-holds-barred campaign against John.

John tossed the book back to the dispatcher. The taxi which had brought him from the station was still waiting. It did not operate from this stand. John rode home in it.

At breakfast he told Edith everything.

"It's a shakedown, Edie. She wants twenty thousand dollars."

For a bad moment he wondered if she'd doubt him. He could hardly blame her if she did. He was too proud to say, "She didn't really come in at midnight; she came only to the front walk." If Edie trusted him she'd have to figure that out herself.

He knew it was all right when Edith exclaimed bitterly, "She's a devil, that woman! I knew it all the time. Oh, John, what can we do?"

"Let's see if she really *is* running that ad."

John searched through the classified columns of the *Evening Tribune*, while Edith looked in the *Morning Clarion*.

It wasn't in the *Tribune*.

"Here it is in the *Clarion*," Edith announced dismally. She read aloud:

"'Just \$70,000 for this lovely apartment of six compact units. Has every modern convenience. Hardwood floors throughout. BUY IT. Call Garfield 6600.'"

John looked up Clara Grant's number in the phone book. It was Garfield 6600.

"But you said *twenty* thousand, John," Edith exclaimed in confusion. "And the ad says *seventy*."

"The place is mortgaged to its full value, fifty thousand," John explained. "So I'd only have to raise twenty."

He drove dispiritedly to his office and sent for Dave Marcum. After bringing Dave up to date he said, "My only chance is to get the goods on her before the deadline. Get busy, Dave. I can't believe it's the first time she ever blackmailed anybody. Go back over her life. Find out whom she plays with. I want a microscopic report on her, and fast."

"Here's an angle," Dave suggested. "Maybe she's afraid the *Clarion* won't print that taxicab evidence without some solid charge to tie it in with. Like a lawsuit, or a street fight, or something."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, suppose some man's in this with her. She gets him to punch you in the nose on the City Hall steps, him giving the taxicab visits for a motive. Or maybe the boy-friend beats *her* up, or pretends to, for the same motive. Or say she has a husband in the background who sues for divorce, naming you."

John shook his head bitterly. "You don't know the *Clarion*. It wouldn't wait for an excuse like that to smear me with every dirty straw in the wind."

The deadline was three weeks away.

At the end of the first week Dave reported, "I guess I was wrong, Mr. Norman. She's in this on her own, and I'll bet my badge on it. If she had a husband or a boy-friend or a lawyer working with her, I'd have turned him up by now."

"Dig deeper," John said. "Go farther back."

Another week dragged by. Clara Grant's ad continued to run every morning in the *Clarion*.

Then Marcum reported again. He looked more baffled than ever. "I still can't tie anything on her, Mr. Norman. She's played the stock market a few times, and lost, but who hasn't? All five tenants at her apartment house think she's on the level."

"Keep digging," John said.

He went into the last week of his campaign with a hopeless feel-

ing. What good would it do? Before polling day he'd be head over heels in scandal. The *Clarion* would pounce on it. Of that he was certain. The cabstand data was documentary evidence, and they'd use it with or without a boost from any other source.

The day of the deadline came: Friday before election. At eleven in the morning Clara Grant telephoned. Her voice said ominously, "You have seven hours, Mr. Norman."

Six of those hours slipped by and John went drearily home. Edith put her arms around him. "You've nothing to be ashamed of, John," she said.

"Lots of people," he told her, "will think I have. They'll whisper like witches."

"Let them," she said, with a lightness she didn't feel. She broke away and crossed to the fireplace. She picked up the gold compact from the mantel. "I stopped in at Leighton's today, John."

"The jeweler? Was the compact bought there?"

"I don't know," Edith said. "I just figured that if it were bought in town it must come from Leighton's, it's such an expensive thing. I spoke to Mr. Craft, the man who sold us our silver. He said he thought the compact was specially made. He found a tiny registration number in the lid, and he said he would check through the files and call me. If we can find out who bought the compact, maybe—"

"How did you tell him you got hold of it?" John asked anxiously.

"I said I found it and wanted to return it to its owner."

"But he hasn't called you?"

"No." Edith's voice was dejected. "He hasn't called."

They were both watching the living-room clock when it struck six.

"The deadline," John said.

Exactly an hour later the door chimes sounded. John went to the door. The man he saw on the front porch was slight and gray. John didn't invite him in.

"What do you want, Crowder?" John demanded.

Joshua Crowder was no mere reporter for the *Clarion*. He was

the managing editor himself. Just now he seemed mild and inoffensive. But John knew he was tricky and craftily ambitious. He'd go the limit in polishing an apple for his boss and owner, J. Harrison Hardesty.

The man produced a typed note. "It's a copy," he announced, "of one somebody dropped on the city desk at six o'clock. Any comment, Mr. Mayor?"

John read it. Its wording ruthlessly fulfilled Clara Grant's threat. Her name wasn't on it. It might have come from a taxi driver with a grudge.

Crowder was too smart a newspaperman not to have stopped by the cabstand on the way here. Beyond doubt he'd copied down the cab-book entries and interviewed the dispatcher and a few cabbies.

"They all describe the same woman," he said, with a studied innocence. "How do you explain it, Mr. Mayor?"

"How would *you* explain it?"

"Obviously," Crowder said with a disarming candor, "it's a crude attempt at blackmail."

"Obviously," John echoed, so harassed that he failed to see the trap.

"Ah!" Crowder exclaimed, his eyes lighting. "Blackmail!" He was thinking in headlines already. "Have you anything to add? We'll have to cover it, of course, in our Bulldog edition."

"That's all." John closed the door and turned to Edith.

Her face was distraught. "But you shouldn't have admitted it was blackmail, John."

"Why not? It's the truth."

"But don't you see? Now you've given him a clear track. He won't even have to bother about ethics."

John laughed scornfully. "He wouldn't let ethics stop him. Not Crowder. It's just the chance he's been waiting for to get in solid with Old Man Hardesty."

He went to the telephone and called Pete Delby. "We're on a spot, Pete. The *Clarion's* printing a smear story. It's a frame, but it's dynamite. Meet me at campaign headquarters, Pete, and we'll

hold a wake over it. And maybe you'd better round up some of our friends from the *Tribune*."

After he'd gone Edith Norman reviewed the situation in a mood of despair. In less than five hours that hideous story would be public gossip. It would wreck John's career.

Clara Grant! What did they know about the woman. What could they prove? Nothing, except that she owned an apartment house which she was advertising for \$70,000. Every morning Edith had seen the ad in the *Clarion*. A brazen demand, and yet what a cunning cover-up! If John paid her price it would be no more incriminating than if he'd responded to any other ad in the column.

Desolate and restless, Edith picked up the last issue of the *Clarion* and was reading the ad again, when the phone rang.

"Mrs. Norman?" a cultured masculine voice inquired.

"Yes," Edith said.

"This is Mr. Craft, of Leighton's, Mrs. Norman. I must humbly apologize for not having called you sooner about the owner of the compact. It slipped my mind completely. It wasn't until I got home that I realized—"

"That's quite all right," Edith interrupted. "You are very kind to take the trouble. Did you find—?"

"No trouble at all, I assure you, Mrs. Norman. Any time Leighton's can be of service to you or the Mayor we will be proud—"

"Thank you, Mr. Craft. Did you find the owner? Was it one of your compacts?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, it is one of ours. And a very beautiful piece of work, if I may say so. It was especially executed for Mr. Hardesty—J. Harrison Hardesty. Mrs. Hardesty will be most grateful that someone of your honesty—"

"But the initials—" Edith began. Then she paused, a chill running through her.

"I beg your pardon," Mr. Craft said.

"You have been more helpful than I can tell you, Mr. Craft. I am indebted to you."

Mr. Craft laughed with derision. "It is we who are indebted to you, Mrs. Norman. Any time Leighton's can—"

"Yes, thank you," Edith said. She hung up slowly. Her mind raced from one thought to another, incapable of grasping the real meaning of this unexpected revelation.

She stared, unseeing, at the ad; then her eyes focused:

"Just \$70,000 for this lovely apartment of six compact units. Has every modern convenience. Hardwood floors throughout. BUY IT! Call Garfield 6600."

From the first she'd noted the word "compact," a subtly insidious reminder to her victim. But now, reading the ad again, Edith saw something else. Reading only the capitals, she saw that the ad said:

JHH BUY IT! CG.

JHH stood for J. Harrison Hardesty, owner of the *Clarion*.

Downtown at campaign headquarters, John Norman and his brain trust were sweating it out. Pete Delby was there, swathed in gloom, as was Sam Casey of the friendly *Tribune*.

"When it hits the street," Pete Delby mourned, "we're washed up."

Casey was grimly practical: "Your wife's right, John. You opened the door wide for him when you admitted it was blackmail. Beginning with that as a legitimate news sensation, he can drag in the whole mess. When dog bites mayor, it's news. And editorially he can even be adroit, if he wants to: 'We hope our distinguished mayor will quickly clarify his allegation. In spite of the evidence, reproduced impartially on page one of this issue, it seems incredible that—'"

Ted Porter, a *Tribune* leg man, came in. They'd sent Porter on a scouting tour to the *Clarion*.

Porter stated, "I happened to owe Chet Wilson, their chief proof-reader, a sawbuck. So I dropped in to pay him off just as he was reading proof for the Bulldog edition. He got rid of me before I could see anything but a headline: 'MAYOR ALLEGES BLACKMAIL.' It's a three-column spread, Sam."

Casey looked sourly at his watch. It was ten o'clock. "In just two hours, John, your name's mud."

In the drawing-room of one of the more pretentious homes in the city, J. Harrison Hardesty sat facing a determined woman.

"You contradict yourself, Mrs. Norman," he protested. "First you say she's trying to make your husband buy a property for twenty thousand more than it's worth. Then you say she's trying to make *me* buy it."

"On the surface," Edith agreed, "it doesn't seem to make sense. Still, 'JHH BUY IT CG' either means she has something on you, or else it's a coincidence. I don't believe in coincidences, Mr. Hardesty. I think she made the demand of you, before she ever thought of my husband, and you turned her down."

"Then why," Hardesty refuted, "didn't she shoot her bolt, if she had one?"

"That's the genius of it," Edith said. "The weakness of a black-mailer is that once he executes his threat he's disarmed. He can no longer hope to collect. That was Clara Grant's dilemma. How could she eat her cake and still have it? The answer was to shoot her bolt, not at you but at someone else. It would give you an object lesson. For a convenient alternate, she picked my husband. She framed him, and then made the same demand she'd already made of you. It doubled her motive, because he might even pay off. But her main target all the while has been yourself. Unlike my husband, you're a deep reservoir of wealth which she hopes to dip into again and again."

Hardesty mopped his plump, damp face. "Is that all?"

"There's still the gold compact. It's too heavy and extravagantly expensive for a woman in moderate circumstances to buy for herself. So it was a gift from some man. What man? Yourself, of course. If it weren't, why would Clara so deliberately needle you with it in the ad, and emphasize the pattern by introducing it also into the parallel threat against my husband?"

"You're guessing," Hardesty said.

"No, I'm not, Mr. Hardesty," Edith said quietly. "*I know*. I know that you ordered the compact from Leighton's. It was made to a special design. And I can prove it. Clara can prove some things, too. She can tell tales to your wife—and prove them. In fact, that's

the only real hold she has on you. Your fear of your wife's reaction."

Panic gripped him. He gave an uneasy glance upward, and Edith sensed that his wife was asleep upstairs.

"Isn't it a fact," she pursued, "that you married the Goddard fortune? And that your wife still controls the purse strings? She lets you write checks and give orders. But if she knew about Clara Grant she could put you out in the street."

"You mean," he gasped, "that you'll tell her?"

"It won't be necessary. I'll make a trade with you, Mr. Hardesty. You take the *Clarion* off my husband's neck and I'll take Clara off yours."

He stared hopefully. "But how?"

"I assumed Clara doesn't know your wife's voice. And I'm sure she doesn't know mine."

When Edith explained her plan, Hardesty jumped at it eagerly. Coached by Edith, he called Clara Grant on the telephone. He said to her, "I've told my wife everything, Clara. She knows—But here she is. She'll tell you herself." He handed the phone to Edith.

Edith spoke severely into the mouthpiece: "This is Mrs. Harrison Hardesty. Harrison has made a clean breast of his indiscretions, Miss Grant, and I intend to ignore the matter. But if you annoy him again, I'll personally prosecute you for blackmail."

She hung up with an arrogant snap and passed the telephone to Hardesty. "Your turn now. Call the *Clarion*."

"Read it and weep!" Pete Delby mourned as he downed his fifth whisky sour. It was midnight at campaign headquarters and a boy had just delivered them the *Clarion's* Bulldog edition.

John Norman snatched it and looked at page one. The others bunched closely, staring fearfully over his shoulder.

"What is this?" Casey exclaimed. "You been kidding us?"

John turned to page 2, then to page 3, and on through the edition. Bewilderment shocked him. Nowhere was there any mention of himself, nor of a woman who took midnight rides in a cab.

But there was mention of John Norman the following Wednesday, and of his election to Congress. John and Edith sat together in their living-room and read the *Clarion's* full coverage of the victory.

Edith was glowing. She turned to John. "I think," she said, "this would be a propitious moment for us to have a few words from our new congressman."

John's eyes were bright. "No man," he said, "can more truthfully say, 'I owe my victory to my wife.' To her abundance of love, her abundance of trust . . ."

"And," Edith interrupted, laughing, "to her normal allotment of feminine curiosity."

DAMON RUNYON

Sense of Humor

ONE NIGHT I am standing in front of Mindy's restaurant on Broadway, thinking of practically nothing whatever, when all of a sudden I feel a very terrible pain in my left foot. In fact, this pain is so very terrible that it causes me to leap up and down like a bull-frog, and to let out loud cries of agony, and to speak some very profane language, which is by no means my custom, although of course I recognize the pain as coming from a hot foot, because I often experience this pain before.

Furthermore, I know Joe the Joker must be in the neighborhood, as Joe the Joker has the most wonderful sense of humor of anybody in this town, and is always around giving people the hot foot, and gives it to me more times than I can remember. In fact, I hear Joe the Joker invents the hot foot, and it finally becomes a very popular idea all over the country. The way you give a hot foot is to sneak up behind some guy who is standing around thinking of not much, and stick a paper match in his shoe between the sole and the upper along about where his little toe ought to be, and then light the match. By and by the guy will feel a terrible pain in his foot, and will start stamping around, and hollering, and carrying on generally, and it is always a most comical sight and a wonderful laugh to one and all to see him suffer.

No one in the world can give a hot foot as good as Joe the Joker, because it takes a guy who can sneak up very quiet on the guy

who is to get the hot foot, and Joe can sneak up so quiet many guys on Broadway are willing to lay you odds that he can give a mouse a hot foot if you can find a mouse that wears shoes. Furthermore, Joe the Joker can take plenty of care of himself in case the guy who gets the hot foot feels like taking the matter up, which sometimes happens, especially with guys who get their shoes made to order at forty bobs per copy and do not care to have holes burned in these shoes. But Joe does not care what kind of shoes the guys are wearing when he feels like giving out hot foots, and furthermore, he does not care who the guys are, although many citizens think he makes a mistake the time he gives a hot foot to Frankie Ferocious. In fact, many citizens are greatly horrified by this action, and go around saying no good will come of it.

This Frankie Ferocious comes from over in Brooklyn, where he is considered a rising citizen in many respects, and by no means a guy to give hot foots to, especially as Frankie Ferocious has no sense of humor whatever. In fact, he is always very solemn, and nobody ever sees him laugh, and he certainly does not laugh when Joe the Joker gives him a hot foot one day on Broadway when Frankie Ferocious is standing talking over a business matter with some guys from the Bronx. He only scowls at Joe, and says something in Italian, and while I do not understand Italian, it sounds so unpleasant that I guarantee I will leave town inside of the next two hours if he says it to me.

Of course Frankie Ferocious' name is not really Ferocious, but something in Italian like Feroccio, and I hear he originally comes from Sicily, although he lives in Brooklyn for quite some years, and from a modest beginning he builds himself up until he is a very large operator in merchandise of one kind and another, especially alcohol. He is a big guy of maybe thirty-odd, and he has hair blacker than a yard up a chimney, and black eyes, and black eyebrows, and a slow way of looking at people.

Nobody knows a whole lot about Frankie Ferocious, because he never has much to say, and he takes his time saying it, but everybody gives him plenty of room when he comes around, as there are rumors that Frankie never likes to be crowded. As far as I am concerned, I do not care for any part of Frankie Ferocious, be-

cause his slow way of looking at people always makes me nervous, and I am always sorry Joe the Joker gives him a hot foot, because I figure Frankie Ferocious is bound to consider it a most disrespectful action, and hold it against everybody that lives on the Island of Manhattan.

But Joe the Joker only laughs when anybody tells him he is out of line in giving Frankie the hot foot, and says it is not his fault if Frankie has no sense of humor. Furthermore, Joe says he will not only give Frankie another hot foot if he gets a chance, but that he will give hot feet to the Prince of Wales or Mussolini, if he catches them in the right spot, although Regret, the horse player, states that Joe can have twenty to one any time that he will not give Mussolini any hot feet and get away with it.

Anyway, just as I suspect, there is Joe the Joker watching me when I feel the hot foot, and he is laughing very heartily, and furthermore, a large number of other citizens are also laughing heartily, because Joe the Joker never sees any fun in giving people the hot foot unless others are present to enjoy the joke. Well, naturally when I see who it is gives me the hot foot I join in the laughter, and go over and shake hands with Joe, and when I shake hands with him there is more laughter, because it seems Joe has a hunk of Limburger cheese in his duke, and what I shake hands with is this Limburger. Furthermore, it is some of Mindy's Limburger cheese, and everybody knows Mindy's Limburger is very squashy, and also very loud.

Of course I laugh at this, too, although to tell the truth I will laugh much more heartily if Joe the Joker drops dead in front of me, because I do not like to be made the subject of laughter on Broadway. But my laugh is really quite hearty when Joe takes the rest of the cheese that is not on my fingers and smears it on the steering wheels of some automobiles parked in front of Mindy's, because I get to thinking of what the drivers will say when they start steering their cars.

Then I get to talking to Joe the Joker, and I ask him how things are up in Harlem, where Joe and his younger brother, Freddy, and several other guys have a small organization operating in beer, and Joe says things are as good as can be expected considering

business conditions. Then I ask him how Rosa is getting along, this Rosa being Joe the Joker's ever-loving wife, and a personal friend of mine, as I know her when she is Rosa Midnight and is singing in the old Hot Box before Joe hauls off and marries her.

Well, at this question Joe the Joker starts laughing, and I can see that something appeals to his sense of humor, and finally he speaks as follows:

"Why," he says, "do you not hear the news about Rosa? She takes the wind on me a couple of months ago for my friend Frankie Ferocious, and is living in an apartment over in Brooklyn, right near his house, although," Joe says, "of course you understand I am telling you this only to answer your question, and not to holler copper on Rosa."

Then he lets out another large ha-ha, and in fact Joe the Joker keeps laughing until I am afraid he will injure himself internally. Personally, I do not see anything comical in a guy's ever-loving wife taking the wind on him for a guy like Frankie Ferocious, so when Joe the Joker quiets down a bit I ask him what is funny about the proposition.

"Why," Joe says, "I have to laugh every time I think of how the big greaseball is going to feel when he finds out how expensive Rosa is. I do not know how many things Frankie Ferocious has running for him in Brooklyn," Joe says, "but he better try to move himself in on the mint if he wishes to keep Rosa going." Then he laughs again, and I consider it wonderful the way Joe is able to keep his sense of humor even in such a situation as this, although up to this time I always think Joe is very daffy indeed about Rosa, who is a little doll, weighing maybe ninety pounds with her hat on and quite cute.

Now I judge from what Joe the Joker tells me that Frankie Ferocious knows Rosa before Joe marries her and is always pitching to her when she is singing in the Hot Box, and even after she is Joe's ever-loving wife, Frankie occasionally calls her up, especially when he commences to be a rising citizen of Brooklyn. although of course Joe does not learn about these calls until later. And about the time Frankie Ferocious commences to be a rising citizen of Brooklyn, things begin breaking a little tough for Joe the

Joker, what with the depression and all, and he has to economize on Rosa in spots, and if there is one thing Rosa cannot stand it is being economized on. Along about now, Joe the Joker gives Frankie Ferocious the hot foot, and just as many citizens state at the time, it is a mistake, for Frankie starts calling Rosa up more than somewhat, and speaking of what a nice place Brooklyn is to live in—which it is, at that—and between these boosts for Brooklyn and Joe the Joker's economy, Rosa hauls off and takes the subway to Borough Hall, leaving Joe a note telling him that if he does not like it he knows what he can do.

"Well, Joe," I say, after listening to his story, "I always hate to hear of these little domestic difficulties among my friends, but maybe this is all for the best. Still, I feel sorry for you, if it will do you any good," I say.

"Do not feel sorry for me," Joe says. "If you wish to feel sorry for anybody, feel sorry for Frankie Ferocious, and," he says, "if you can spare a little more sorrow, give it to Rosa." And Joe the Joker laughs very heartily again and starts telling me about a little scatter that he has up in Harlem where he keeps a chair fixed up with electric wires so he can give anybody that sits down in it a nice jolt, which sounds very humorous to me, at that, especially when Joe tells me how they turn on too much juice one night and almost kill Commodore Jake.

Finally Joe says he has to get back to Harlem, but first he goes to the telephone in the corner cigar store and calls up Mindy's and imitates a doll's voice, and tells Mindy he is Peggy Joyce, or somebody, and orders fifty dozen sandwiches sent up at once to an apartment in West Seventy-second Street for a birthday party, although of course there is no such number as he gives, and nobody there will wish fifty dozen sandwiches if there is such a number.

Then Joe gets in his car and starts off, and while he is waiting for the traffic lights at Fiftieth Street, I see citizens on the sidewalks making sudden leaps, and looking around very fierce, and I know Joe the Joker is plugging them with pellets made out of tin foil, which he fires from a rubber band hooked between his thumb and forefinger.

Joe the Joker is very expert with this proposition, and it is very funny to see the citizens jump, although once or twice in his life Joe makes a miscue and knocks out somebody's eye. But it is all in fun, and shows you what a wonderful sense of humor Joe has.

Well, a few days later I see by the papers where a couple of Harlem guys Joe the Joker is mobbed up with are found done up in sacks over in Brooklyn, very dead indeed, and the coppers say it is because they are trying to move in on certain business enterprises that belong to nobody but Frankie Ferocious. But of course the coppers do not say Frankie Ferocious puts these guys in the sacks, because in the first place Frankie will report them to Headquarters if the coppers say such a thing about him, and in the second place putting guys in sacks is strictly a St. Louis idea and to have a guy put in a sack properly you have to send to St. Louis for experts in this matter.

Now, putting a guy in a sack is not as easy as it sounds, and in fact it takes quite a lot of practice and experience. To put a guy in a sack properly, you first have to put him to sleep, because naturally no guy is going to walk into a sack wide awake unless he is a plumb sucker. Some people claim the best way to put a guy to sleep is to give him a sleeping powder of some kind in a drink, but the real experts just tap the guy on the noggin with a blackjack, which saves the expense of buying the drink. Anyway, after the guy is asleep, you double him up like a pocket knife, and tie a cord or a wire around his neck and under his knees. Then you put him in a gunny sack, and leave him some place, and by and by when the guy wakes up and finds himself in the sack, naturally he wants to get out and the first thing he does it to try to straighten out his knees. This pulls the cord around his neck up so tight that after a while the guy is all out of breath. So then when somebody comes along and opens the sack they find the guy dead, and nobody is responsible for this unfortunate situation, because after all the guy really commits suicide, because if he does not try to straighten out his knees he may live to a ripe old age, if he recovers from the tap on the noggin.

Well, a couple of days later I see by the papers where three Brook-

lyn citizens are scragged as they are walking peaceably along Clinton Street, the scragging being done by some parties in an automobile who seem to have a machine gun, and the papers state that the citizens are friends of Frankie Ferocious, and that it is rumored the parties with the machine gun are from Harlem. I judge by this that there is some trouble in Brooklyn, especially as about a week after the citizens are scragged in Clinton Street, another Harlem guy is found done up in a sack like a Virginia ham near Prospect Park, and now who is it but Joe the Joker's brother, Freddy, and I know Joe is going to be greatly displeased by this. By and by it gets so nobody in Brooklyn will open as much as a sack of potatoes without first calling in the gendarmes, for fear a pair of No. 8 shoes will jump out at them.

Now one night I see Joe the Joker, and this time he is all alone, and I wish to say I am willing to leave him all alone, because something tells me he is hotter than a stove. But he grabs me as I am going past, so naturally I stop to talk to him, and the first thing I say is how sorry I am about his brother. "Well," Joe the Joker says, "Freddy is always a kind of a sap. Rosa calls him up and asks him to come over to Brooklyn to see her. She wishes to talk to Freddy about getting me to give her a divorce," Joe says, "so she can marry Frankie Ferocious, I suppose. Anyway," he says, "Freddy tells Commodore Jake why he is going to see her. Freddy always likes Rosa, and thinks maybe he can patch it up between us. So," Joe says, "he winds up in a sack. They get him after he leaves her apartment. I do not claim Rosa will ask him to come over if she has any idea he will be sacked," Joe says, "but," he says, "she is responsible. She is a bad-luck doll." Then he starts to laugh, and at first I am greatly horrified, thinking it is because something about Freddy being sacked strikes his sense of humor, when he says to me like this: "Say," he says, "I am going to play a wonderful joke on Frankie Ferocious."

"Well, Joe," I say, "you are not asking me for advice, but I am going to give you some free gratis, and for nothing. Do not play any jokes on Frankie Ferocious, as I hear he has no more sense of humor than a nanny goat. I hear Frankie Ferocious will not laugh

if you have Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn and Joe Cook telling him jokes all at once. In fact," I say, "I hear he is a tough audience."

"Oh," Joe the Joker says, "he must have some sense of humor somewhere to stand for Rosa. I hear he is daffy about her. In fact, I understand she is the only person in the world he really likes, and trusts. But I must play a joke on him. I am going to have myself delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack."

Well, of course I have to laugh at this myself, and Joe the Joker laughs with me. Personally, I am laughing just at the idea of anybody having themselves delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack, and especially Joe the Joker, but of course I have no idea Joe really means what he says.

"Listen," Joe says, finally. "A guy from St. Louis who is a friend of mine is doing most of the sacking for Frankie Ferocious. His name is Ropes McGonnigle. In fact," Joe says, "he is a very dear old pal of mine, and he has a wonderful sense of humor like me. Ropes McGonnigle has nothing whatever to do with sacking Freddy," Joe says, "and he is very indignant about it since he finds out Freddy is my brother, so he is anxious to help me play a joke on Frankie. Only last night," Joe says, "Frankie Ferocious sends for Ropes and tells him he will appreciate it as a special favor if Ropes will bring me to him in a sack. I suppose," Joe says, "that Frankie Ferocious hears from Rosa what Freddy is bound to tell her about my ideas on divorce. I have very strict ideas on divorce," Joe says, "especially where Rosa is concerned. I will see her in what's-this before I ever do her and Frankie Ferocious such a favor as giving her a divorce."

"Anyway," Joe the Joker says, "Ropes tells me about Frankie Ferocious prepositioning him, so I send Ropes back to Frankie Ferocious to tell him he knows I am to be in Brooklyn to-morrow night, and furthermore, Ropes tells Frankie that he will have me in a sack in no time. And so he will," Joe says.

"Well," I say, "personally, I see no percentage in being delivered to Frankie Ferocious in a sack, because as near as I can make out from what I read in the papers, there is no future for a guy in a

sack that goes to Frankie Ferocious. What I cannot figure out," I say, "is where the joke on Frankie comes in."

"Why," Joe the Joker says, "the joke is, I will not be asleep in the sack, and my hands will not be tied, and in each of my hands I will have a John Roscoe, so when the sack is delivered to Frankie Ferocious and I pop out blasting away, can you not imagine his astonishment?"

Well, I can imagine this, all right. In fact, when I get to thinking of the look of surprise that is bound to come to Frankie Ferocious' face when Joe the Joker comes out of the sack I have to laugh, and Joe the Joker laughs right along with me. "Of course," Joe says, "Ropes McGonnigle will be there to start blasting with me, in case Frankie Ferocious happens to have any company."

Then Joe the Joker goes on up the street, leaving me still laughing from thinking of how amazed Frankie Ferocious will be when Joe bounces out of the sack and starts throwing slugs around and about. I do not hear of Joe from that time to this, but I hear the rest of the story from very reliable parties.

It seems that Ropes McGonnigle does not deliver the sack himself, after all, but sends it by an expressman to Frankie Ferocious' home. Frankie Ferocious receives many sacks such as this in his time, because it seems that it is a sort of passion with him to personally view the contents of the sacks and check up on them before they are distributed about the city, and of course Ropes McGonnigle knows about this passion from doing so much sacking for Frankie.

When the expressman takes the sack into Frankie's house, Frankie personally lugs it down into his basement, and there he outs with a big John Roscoe and fires six shots into the sack, because it seems Ropes McGonnigle tips him off to Joe the Joker's plan to pop out of the sack and start blasting.

I hear Frankie Ferocious has a very strange expression on his pan and is laughing the only laugh anybody ever hears from him when the gendarmes break in and put the arm on him for murder, because it seems that when Ropes McGonnigle tells Frankie of Joe the Joker's plan, Frankie tells Ropes what he is going to do with

his own hands before opening the sack. Naturally, Ropes speaks to Joe the Joker of Frankie's idea about filling the sack full of slugs, and Joe's sense of humor comes right out again.

So, bound and gagged, but otherwise as right as rain in the sack that is delivered to Frankie Ferocious, is by no means Joe the Joker, but Rosa.

P. G. WODEHOUSE

Uncle Fred Flits By

IN ORDER that they might enjoy their after-luncheon coffee in peace, the Crumpet had taken the guest whom he was entertaining at the Drones Club to the smaller and less frequented of the two smoking-rooms. In the other, he explained, though the conversation always touched an exceptionally high level of brilliance, there was apt to be a good deal of sugar thrown about.

The guest said he understood.

"Young blood, eh?"

"That's right. Young blood."

"And animal spirits."

"And animal, as you say, spirits," agreed the Crumpet. "We get a fairish amount of those here."

"The complaint, however, is not, I observe, universal."

"Eh?"

The other drew his host's attention to the doorway, where a young man in form-fitting tweeds had just appeared. The aspect of this young man was haggard. His eyes glared wildly and he sucked at an empty cigarette-holder. If he had a mind, there was something on it. When the Crumpet called to him to come and join the party, he merely shook his head in a distraught sort of way and disappeared, looking like a character out of a Greek tragedy pursued by the Fates.

The Crumpet sighed.

"Poor old Pongo!"

"Pongo?"

"That was Pongo Twistleton. He's all broken up about his Uncle Fred."

"Dead?"

"No such luck. Coming up to London again tomorrow. Pongo had a wire this morning."

"And that upsets him?"

"Naturally. After what happened last time."

"What was that?"

"Ah!" said the Crumpet.

"What happened last time?"

"You may well ask."

"I do ask."

"Ah!" said the Crumpet.

Poor old Pongo (said the Crumpet) has often discussed his Uncle Fred with me, and if there weren't tears in his eyes when he did so, I don't know a tear in the eye when I see one. In round numbers the Earl of Ickenham, of Ickenham Hall, Ickenham, Hants, he lives in the country most of the year, but from time to time has a nasty way of slipping his collar and getting loose and descending upon Pongo at his flat in the Albany. And every time he does so, the unhappy young blighter is subjected to some soul-testing experience. Because the trouble with this uncle is that, though sixty if a day, he becomes on arriving in the metropolis as young as he feels—which is, apparently, a youngish twenty-two. I don't know if you happen to know what the word "excesses" means, but those are what Pongo's Uncle Fred from the country, when in London, invariably commits.

It wouldn't so much matter, mind you, if he would confine his activities to the club premises. We're pretty broad-minded here, and if you stop short of smashing the piano, there isn't much that you can do at the Drones that will cause the raised eyebrow and the sharp intake of breath. The snag is that he will insist on lugging Pongo out in the open and there, right in the public eye, proceeding to step high, wide and plentiful.

So when, on the occasion to which I allude, he stood pink and genial on Pongo's hearth-rug, bulging with Pongo's lunch and wreathed in the smoke of one of Pongo's cigars, and said: "And now, my boy, for a pleasant and instructive afternoon," you will readily understand why the unfortunate young clam gazed at him as he would have gazed at two-penn'orth of dynamite, had he discovered it lighting up in his presence.

"A what?" he said, giving at the knees and paling beneath the tan a bit.

"A pleasant and instructive afternoon," repeated Lord Ickenham, rolling the words round his tongue. "I propose that you place yourself in my hands and leave the program entirely to me."

Now, owing to Pongo's circumstances being such as to necessitate his getting into the aged relative's ribs at intervals and shaking him down for an occasional much-needed tenner or what not, he isn't in a position to use the iron hand with the old buster. But at these words he displayed a manly firmness.

"You aren't going to get me to the dog races again."

"No, no."

"You remember what happened last June."

"Quite," said Lord Ickenham, "quite. Though I still think that a wiser magistrate would have been content with a mere reprimand."

"And I won't——"

"Certainly not. Nothing of that kind at all. What I propose to do this afternoon is to take you to visit the home of your ancestors."

Pongo did not get this.

"I thought Ickenham was the home of my ancestors."

"It is one of the homes of your ancestors. They also resided rather nearer the heart of things, at a place called Mitching Hill."

"Down in the suburbs, do you mean?"

"The neighborhood is now suburban, true. It is many years since the meadows where I sported as a child were sold and cut up into building lots. But when I was a boy Mitching Hill was open country. It was a vast, rolling estate belonging to your great-uncle, Marmaduke, a man with whiskers of a nature which you

with your pure mind would scarcely credit, and I have long felt a sentimental urge to see what the hell the old place looks like now. Perfectly foul, I expect. Still, I think we should make the pious pilgrimage."

Pongo absolutely-ed heartily. He was all for the scheme. A great weight seemed to have rolled off his mind. The way he looked at it was that even an uncle within a short jump of the looney bin couldn't very well get into much trouble in a suburb. I mean, you know what suburbs are. They don't, as it were, offer the scope. One follows his reasoning, of course.

"Fine!" he said. "Splendid! Topping!"

"Then put on your hat and rompers, my boy," said Lord Ickenham, "and let us be off. I fancy one gets there by omnibuses and things."

Well, Pongo hadn't expected much in the way of mental uplift from the sight of Mitching Hill, and he didn't get it. Alighting from the bus, he tells me, you found yourself in the middle of rows and rows of semi-detached villas, all looking exactly alike, and you went on and you came to more semi-detached villas, and those all looked exactly alike, too. Nevertheless, he did not repine. It was one of those early spring days which suddenly change to mid-winter and he had come out without his overcoat, and it looked like rain and he hadn't an umbrella, but despite this his mood was one of sober ecstasy. The hours were passing and his uncle had not yet made a goat of himself. At the Dog Races the other had been in the hands of the constabulary in the first ten minutes.

It began to seem to Pongo that with any luck he might be able to keep the old blister pottering harmlessly about here till nightfall, when he could shoot a bit of dinner into him and put him to bed. And as Lord Ickenham had specifically stated that his wife, Pongo's Aunt Jane, had expressed her intention of scalping him with a blunt knife if he wasn't back at the Hall by lunch time on the morrow, it really looked as if he might get through this visit without perpetrating a single major outrage on the public weal. It is rather interesting to note that as he thought this Pongo smiled, because it was the last time he smiled that day.

All this while, I should mention, Lord Ickenham had been stopping at intervals like a pointing dog and saying that it must have been just about here that he plugged the gardener in the trousers seat with his bow and arrow and that over there he had been sick after his first cigar, and he now paused in front of a villa which for some unknown reason called itself *The Cedars*. His face was tender and wistful.

"On this very spot, if I am not mistaken," he said, heaving a bit of a sigh, "on this very spot, fifty years ago come Lammas Eve, I . . . Oh, blast it!"

The concluding remark had been caused by the fact that the rain, which had held off until now, suddenly began to buzz down like a shower-bath. With no further words, they leaped into the porch of the villa and there took shelter, exchanging glances with a grey parrot which hung in a cage in the window.

Not that you could really call it shelter. They were protected from above all right, but the moisture was now falling with a sort of swivel action, whipping in through the sides of the porch and tickling them up properly. And it was just after Pongo had turned up his collar and was huddling against the door that the door gave way. From the fact that a female of general-servant aspect was standing there he gathered that his uncle must have rung the bell.

This female wore a long mackintosh, and Lord Ickenham beamed upon her with a fairish spot of suavity.

"Good afternoon," he said.

The female said good afternoon.

"The Cedars?"

The female said yes, it was *The Cedars*.

"Are the old folks at home?"

The female said there was nobody at home.

"Ah! Well, never mind. I have come," said Lord Ickenham, edging in, "to clip the parrot's claws. My assistant, Mr. Walkinshaw, who applies the anæsthetic," he added, indicating Pongo with a gesture.

"Are you from the bird shop?"

"A very happy guess."

"Nobody told me you were coming."

"They keep things from you, do they?" said Lord Ickenham, sympathetically. "Too bad."

Continuing to edge, he had got into the parlor by now, Pongo following in a sort of dream and the female following Pongo.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," she said. "I was just going out. It's my afternoon."

"Go out," said Lord Ickenham cordially. "By all means go out. We will leave everything in order."

And presently the female, though still a bit on the dubious side, pushed off, and Lord Ickenham lit the gas-fire and drew a chair up.

"So here we are, my boy," he said. "A little tact, a little address, and here we are, snug and cosy and not catching our deaths of cold. You'll never go far wrong if you leave things to me."

"But, dash it, we can't stop here," said Pongo.

Lord Ickenham raised his eyebrows.

"Not stop here? Are you suggesting that we go out into that rain? My dear lad, you are not aware of the grave issues involved. This morning, as I was leaving home, I had a rather painful disagreement with your aunt. She said the weather was treacherous and wished me to take my woolly muffler. I replied that the weather was not treacherous and that I would be dashed if I took my woolly muffler. Eventually, by the exercise of an iron will, I had my way, and I ask you, my dear boy, to envisage what will happen if I return with a cold in the head. I shall sink to the level of a fifth-class power. Next time I came to London, it would be with a liver pad and a respirator. No! I shall remain here, toasting my toes at this really excellent fire. I had no idea that a gas-fire radiated such warmth. I feel all in a glow."

So did Pongo. His brow was wet with honest sweat. He is reading for the Bar, and while he would be the first to admit that he hasn't yet got a complete toe-hold on the Law of Great Britain he had a sort of notion that oiling into a perfect stranger's semi-detached villa on the pretext of pruning the parrot was a tort or a misdemeanor, if not actually barratry or soccage in fief or something like that. And apart from the legal aspect of the matter there was the embarrassment of the thing. Nobody is more of a whale on

correctness and not doing what's not done than Pongo, and the situation in which he now found himself caused him to chew the lower lip and, as I say, perspire a goodish deal.

"But suppose the blighter who owns this ghastly house comes back?" he asked. "Talking of envisaging things, try that one over on your pianola."

And, sure enough, as he spoke, the front door bell rang.

"There!" said Pongo.

"Don't say 'There!' my boy," said Lord Ickenham reprovingly. "It's the sort of thing your aunt says. I see no reason for alarm. Obviously this is some casual caller. A ratepayer would have used his latchkey. Glance cautiously out of the window and see if you can see anybody."

"It's a pink chap," said Pongo, having done so.

"How pink?"

"Pretty pink."

"Well, there you are, then. I told you so. It can't be the big chief. The sort of fellows who own houses like this are pale and sallow, owing to working in offices all day. Go and see what he wants."

"You go and see what he wants."

"We'll both go and see what he wants," said Lord Ickenham.

So they went and opened the front door, and there, as Pongo had said, was a pink chap. A small young pink chap, a bit moist about the shoulder-blades.

"Pardon me," said this pink chap, "is Mr. Roddis in?"

"No," said Pongo.

"Yes," said Lord Ickenham. "Don't be silly, Douglas—of course I'm in. I am Mr. Roddis," he said to the pink chap. "This, such as he is, is my son Douglas. And you?"

"Name of Robinson."

"What about it?"

"My name's Robinson."

"Oh, *your* name's Robinson? Now we've got it straight. Delighted to see you, Mr. Robinson. Come right in and take your boots off."

They all trickled back to the parlor, Lord Ickenham pointing

out objects of interest by the wayside to the chap, Pongo gulping for air a bit and trying to get himself abreast of this new twist in the scenario. His heart was becoming more and more bowed down with weight of woe. He hadn't liked being Mr. Walkinshaw, the anæsthetist, and he didn't like it any better being Roddis Junior. In brief, he feared the worst. It was only too plain to him by now that his uncle had got it thoroughly up his nose and had settled down to one of his big afternoons, and he was asking himself, as he had so often asked himself before, what would the harvest be?

Arrived in the parlor, the pink chap proceeded to stand on one leg and look coy.

"Is Julia here?" he asked, simpering a bit, Pongo says.

"Is she?" said Lord Ickenham to Pongo.

"No," said Pongo.

"No," said Lord Ickenham.

"She wired me she was coming here to-day."

"Ah, then we shall have a bridge four."

The pink chap stood on the other leg.

"I don't suppose you've ever met Julia. Bit of trouble in the family, she gave me to understand."

"It is often the way."

"The Julia I mean is your niece Julia Parker. Or, rather, your wife's niece Julia Parker."

"Any niece of my wife is a niece of mine," said Lord Ickenham heartily. "We share and share alike."

"Julia and I want to get married."

"Well, go ahead."

"But they won't let us."

"Who won't?"

"Her mother and father. And Uncle Charlie Parker and Uncle Henry Parker and the rest of them. They don't think I'm good enough."

"The morality of the modern young man is notoriously lax."

"Class enough, I mean. They're a haughty lot."

"What makes them haughty? Are they earls?"

"No, they aren't earls."

"Then why the devil," said Lord Ickenham warmly, "are they haughty? Only earls have a right to be haughty. Earls are hot stuff. When you get an earl, you've got something."

"Besides, we've had words. Me and her father. One thing led to another, and in the end I called him a perishing old——Coo!" said the pink chap, breaking off suddenly.

He had been standing by the window, and he now leaped listlessly into the middle of the room, causing Pongo, whose nervous system was by this time definitely down among the wines and spirits and who hadn't been expecting this *adagio* stuff, to bite his tongue with some severity.

"They're on the doorstep! Julia and her mother and father. I didn't know they were all coming."

"You do not wish to meet them?"

"No, I don't!"

"Then duck behind the settee, Mr. Robinson," said Lord Ickenham, and the pink chap, weighing the advice and finding it good, did so. And as he disappeared the door bell rang.

Once more, Lord Ickenham led Pongo out into the hall.

"I say!" said Pongo, and a close observer might have noted that he was quivering like an aspen.

"Say on, my dear boy."

"I mean to say, what?"

"What?"

"You aren't going to let these bounders in, are you?"

"Certainly," said Lord Ickenham. "We Roddises keep open house. And as they are presumably aware that Mr. Roddis has no son, I think we had better return to the old layout. You are the local vet, my boy, come to minister to my parrot. When I return, I should like to find you by the cage, staring at the bird in a scientific manner. Tap your teeth from time to time with a pencil and try to smell of iodoform. It will help to add conviction."

So Pongo shifted back to the parrot's cage and stared so earnestly that it was only when a voice said "Well!" that he became aware that there was anybody in the room. Turning, he perceived that Hampshire's leading curse had come back, bringing the gang.

It consisted of a stern, thin, middle-aged woman, a middle-aged man and a girl.

You can generally accept Pongo's estimate of girls, and when he says that this one was a pippin one, know that he uses the term in its more exact sense. She was about nineteen, he thinks, and she wore a black *béret*, a dark-green leather coat, a shortish tweed skirt, silk stockings and high-heeled shoes. Her eyes were large and lustrous and her face like a dewy rosebud at daybreak on a June morning. So Pongo tells me. Not that I suppose he has ever seen a rosebud at daybreak on a June morning, because it's generally as much as you can do to lug him out of bed in time for nine-thirty breakfast. Still, one gets the idea.

"Well," said the woman, "you don't know who I am, I'll be bound. I'm Laura's sister Connie. This is Claude, my husband. And this is my daughter Julia. Is Laura in?"

"I regret to say, no," said Lord Ickenham.

The woman was looking at him as if he didn't come up to her specifications.

"I thought you were younger," she said.

"Younger than what?" said Lord Ickenham.

"Younger than you are."

"You can't be younger than you are, worse luck," said Lord Ickenham. "Still, one does one's best, and I am bound to say that of recent years I have made a pretty good go of it."

The woman caught sight of Pongo, and he didn't seem to please her, either.

"Who's that?"

"The local vet, clustering round my parrot."

"I can't talk in front of him."

"It is quite all right," Lord Ickenham assured her. "The poor fellow is stone deaf."

And with an imperious gesture at Pongo, as much as to bid him stare less at girls and more at parrots, he got the company seated.

"Now, then," he said.

There was silence for a moment, then a sort of muffled sob, which Pongo thinks proceeded from the girl. He couldn't see, of

course, because his back was turned and he was looking at the parrot, which looked back at him—most offensively, he says, as parrots will, using one eye only for the purpose. It also asked him to have a nut.

The woman came into action again.

"Although," she said, "Laura never did me the honor to invite me to her wedding, for which reason I have not communicated with her for five years, necessity compels me to cross her threshold to-day. There comes a time when differences must be forgotten and relatives must stand shoulder to shoulder."

"I see what you mean," said Lord Ickenham. "Like the boys of the old brigade."

"What I say is, let bygones be bygones. I would not have intruded on you, but needs must. I disregard the past and appeal to your sense of pity."

The thing began to look to Pongo like a touch, and he is convinced that the parrot thought so, too, for it winked and cleared its throat. But they were both wrong. The woman went on.

"I want you and Laura to take Julia into your home for a week or so, until I can make other arrangements for her. Julia is studying the piano, and she sits for her examination in two weeks' time, so until then she must remain in London. The trouble is, she has fallen in love. Or thinks she has."

"I know I have," said Julia.

Her voice was so attractive that Pongo was compelled to slew round and take another look at her. Her eyes, he says, were shining like twin stars and there was a sort of Soul's Awakening expression on her face, and what the dickens there was in a pink chap like the pink chap, who even as pink chaps go wasn't much of a pink chap, to make her look like that, was frankly, Pongo says, more than he could understand. The thing baffled him. He sought in vain for a solution.

"Yesterday, Claude and I arrived in London from our Bexhill home to give Julia a pleasant surprise. We stayed, naturally, in the boarding-house where she has been living for the past six weeks. And what do you think we discovered?"

"Insects."

"Not insects. A letter. From a young man. I found to my horror that a young man of whom I knew nothing was arranging to marry my daughter. I sent for him immediately, and found him to be quite impossible. He jellies eels!"

"Does what?"

"He is an assistant at a jellied eel shop."

"But surely," said Lord Ickenham, "that speaks well for him. The capacity to jelly an eel seems to me to argue intelligence of a high order. It isn't everybody who can do it, by any means. I know if someone came to me and said 'Jelly this eel!' I should be non-plussed. And so, or I am very much mistaken, would Ramsay MacDonald and Winston Churchill."

The woman did not seem to see eye to eye.

"Tchah!" she said. "What do you suppose my husband's brother Charlie Parker would say if I allowed his niece to marry a man who jellies eels?"

"Ah!" said Claude, who, before we go any further, was a tall, drooping bird with a red soup-strainer moustache.

"Or my husband's brother, Henry Parker."

"Ah!" said Claude. "Or Cousin Alf Robbins, for that matter."

"Exactly. Cousin Alfred would die of shame."

The girl Julia hiccoughed passionately, so much so that Pongo says it was all he could do to stop himself nipping across and taking her hand in his and patting it.

"I've told you a hundred times, mother, that Wilberforce is only jellying eels till he finds something better."

"What is better than an eel?" asked Lord Ickenham, who had been following this discussion with the close attention it deserved. "For jellying purposes, I mean."

"He is ambitious. It won't be long," said the girl, "before Wilberforce suddenly rises in the world."

She never spoke a truer word. At this very moment, up he came from behind the settee like a leaping salmon.

"Julia!" he cried.

"Wilby!" yipped the girl.

And Pongo says he never saw anything more sickening in his life than the way she flung herself into the blighter's arms and clung

there like the ivy on the old garden wall. It wasn't that he had anything specific against the pink chap, but this girl had made a deep impression on him and he resented her glueing herself to another in this manner.

Julia's mother, after just that brief moment which a woman needs in which to recover from her natural surprise at seeing eel-jelliers pop up from behind sofas, got moving and plucked her away like a referee breaking a couple of welter-weights.

"Julia Parker," she said, "I am ashamed of you!"

"So am I," said Claude.

"I blush for you."

"Me too," said Claude. "Hugging and kissing a man who called your father a perishing old bottle-nosed Gawd-help-us."

"I think," said Lord Ickenham, shoving his oar in, "that before proceeding any further we ought to go into that point. If he called you a perishing old bottle-nosed Gawd-help-us, it seems to me that the first thing to do is to decide whether he was right, and frankly, in my opinion . . ."

"Wilberforce will apologize."

"Certainly I'll apologize. It isn't fair to hold a remark passed in the heat of the moment against a chap . . ."

"Mr. Robinson," said the woman, "you know perfectly well that whatever remarks you may have seen fit to pass don't matter one way or the other. If you were listening to what I was saying you will understand . . ."

"Oh, I know, I know. Uncle Charlie Parker and Uncle Henry Parker and Cousin Alf Robbins and all that. Pack of snobs!"

"What!"

"Haughty, stuck-up snobs. Them and their class distinctions. Think themselves everybody just because they've got money. I'd like to know how they got it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind what I mean."

"If you are insinuating——"

"Well, of course, you know, Connie," said Lord Ickenham mildly, "he's quite right. You can't get away from that."

I don't know if you have ever seen a bull-terrier embarking on a

scrap with an Airedale and just as it was getting down nicely to its work suddenly having an unexpected Kerry Blue sneak up behind it and bite it in the rear quarters. When this happens, it lets go of the Airedale and swivels round and fixes the butting-in animal with a pretty nasty eye. It was exactly the same with the woman Connie when Lord Ickenham spoke these words.

"What!"

"I was only wondering if you had forgotten how Charlie Parker made his pile."

"What are you talking about?"

"I know it is painful," said Lord Ickenham, "and one doesn't mention it as a rule, but, as we are on the subject, you must admit that lending money at two hundred and fifty per cent interest is not done in the best circles. The judge, if you remember, said so at the trial."

"I never knew that!" cried the girl Julia.

"Ah," said Lord Ickenham. "You kept it from the child? Quite right, quite right."

"It's a lie!"

"And when Henry Parker had all that fuss with the bank it was touch and go they didn't send him to prison. Between ourselves, Connie, has a bank official, even a brother of your husband, any right to sneak fifty pounds from the till in order to put it on a hundred to one shot for the Grand National? Not quite playing the game, Connie. Not the straight bat. Henry, I grant you, won five thousand of the best and never looked back afterwards, but, though we applaud his judgment of form, we must surely look askance at his financial methods. As for Cousin Alf Robbins . . ."

The woman was making rummy stuttering sounds. Pongo tells me he once had a Pommery Seven which used to express itself in much the same way if you tried to get it to take a hill on high. A sort of mixture of gurgles and explosions.

"There is not a word of truth in this," she gasped at length, having managed to get the vocal cords disentangled. "Not a single word. I think you must have gone mad."

Lord Ickenham shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way, Connie. I was only going to say that,

while the jury were probably compelled on the evidence submitted to them to give Cousin Alf Robbins the benefit of the doubt when charged with smuggling dope, everybody knew that he had been doing it for years. I am not blaming him, mind you. If a man can smuggle cocaine and get away with it, good luck to him, say I. The only point I am trying to make is that we are hardly a family that can afford to put on dog and sneer at honest suitors for our daughters' hands. Speaking for myself, I consider that we are very lucky to have the chance of marrying even into eel-jellying circles."

"So do I," said Julia firmly.

"You don't believe what this man is saying?"

"I believe every word."

"So do I," said the pink chap.

The woman snorted. She seemed overwrought.

"Well," she said, "goodness knows I have never liked Laura, but I would never have wished her a husband like you!"

"Husband?" said Lord Ickenham, puzzled. "What gives you the impression that Laura and I are married?"

There was a weighty silence, during which the parrot threw out a general invitation to the company to join it in a nut. Then the girl Julia spoke.

"You'll have to let me marry Wilberforce now," she said. "He knows too much about us."

"I was rather thinking that myself," said Lord Ickenham. "Seal his lips, I say."

"You wouldn't mind marrying into a low family, would you, darling?" asked the girl, with a touch of anxiety.

"No family could be too low for me, dearest, if it was yours," said the pink chap.

"After all, we needn't see them."

"That's right."

"It isn't one's relations that matters; it's oneself."

"That's right, too."

"Wilby!"

"Julia!"

They repeated the old ivy on the garden wall act. Pongo says he didn't like it any better than the first time, but his distaste wasn't in it with the woman Connie's.

"And what, may I ask," she said, "do you propose to marry on?"

This seemed to cast a damper. They came apart. They looked at each other. The girl looked at the pink chap, and the pink chap looked at the girl. You could see that a jarring note had been struck.

"Wilberforce is going to be a very rich man some day."

"Some day!"

"If I had a hundred pounds," said the pink chap, "I could buy a half-share in one of the best milk walks in South London to-morrow."

"If!" said the woman.

"Ah!" said Claude.

"Where are you going to get it?"

"Ah!" said Claude.

"Where," repeated the woman, plainly pleased with the snappy crack and loath to let it ride without an encore, "are you going to get it?"

"That," said Claude, "is the point. Where are you going to get a hundred pounds?"

"Why, bless my soul," said Lord Ickenham jovially, "from me, of course. Where else?"

And before Pongo's bulging eyes he fished out from the recesses of his costume a crackling bundle of notes and handed it over. And the agony of realizing that the old bounder had had all that stuff on him all this time and that he hadn't touched him for so much as a tithe of it was so keen, Pongo says, that before he knew what he was doing he had let out a sharp, whinnying cry which rang through the room like the yowl of a stepped-on puppy.

"Ah," said Lord Ickenham. "The vet wishes to speak to me. Yes, vet?"

This seemed to puzzle the cerise bloke a bit.

"I thought you said this chap was your son."

"If I had a son," said Lord Ickenham, a little hurt, "he would be

a good deal better-looking than that. No, this is the local veterinary surgeon. I may have said I *looked* on him as a son. Perhaps that was what confused you."

He shifted across to Pongo and twiddled his hands enquiringly. Pongo gaped at him, and it was not until one of the hands caught him smartly in the lower ribs that he remembered he was deaf and started to twiddle back. Considering that he wasn't supposed to be dumb, I can't see why he should have twiddled, but no doubt there are moments when twiddling is about all a fellow feels himself equal to. For what seemed to him at least ten hours Pongo had been undergoing great mental stress, and one can't blame him for not being chatty. Anyway, be that as it may, he twiddled.

"I cannot quite understand what he says," announced Lord Ickenham at length, "because he sprained a finger this morning and that makes him stammer. But I gather that he wishes to have a word with me in private. Possibly my parrot has got something the matter with it which he is reluctant to mention even in sign language in front of a young unmarried girl. You know what parrots are. We will step outside."

"*We* will step outside," said Wilberforce.

"Yes," said the girl Julia. "I feel like a walk."

"And you?" said Lord Ickenham to the woman Connie, who was looking like a female Napoleon at Moscow. "Do you join the hikers?"

"I shall remain and make myself a cup of tea. You will not grudge us a cup of tea, I hope?"

"Far from it," said Lord Ickenham cordially. "This is Liberty Hall. Stick around and mop it up till your eyes bubble."

Outside, the girl, looking more like a dewy rosebud than ever, fawned on the old buster pretty considerably.

"I don't know how to thank you!" she said. And the pink chap said he didn't, either.

"Not at all, my dear, not at all," said Lord Ickenham.

"I think you're simply wonderful."

"No, no."

"You are. Perfectly marvellous."

"Tut, tut," said Lord Ickenham. "Don't give the matter another thought."

He kissed her on both cheeks, the chin, the forehead, the right eyebrow, and the tip of the nose, Pongo looking on the while in a baffled and discontented manner. Everybody seemed to be kissing this girl except him.

Eventually the degrading spectacle ceased and the girl and the pink chap shoved off, and Pongo was enabled to take up the matter of that hundred quid.

"Where," he asked, "did you get all that money?"

"Now, where did I?" mused Lord Ickenham. "I know your aunt gave it to me for some purpose. But what? To pay some bill or other, I rather fancy."

This cheered Pongo up slightly.

"She'll give you the devil when you get back," he said, with not a little relish. "I wouldn't be in your shoes for something. When you tell Aunt Jane," he said, with confidence, for he knew his Aunt Jane's emotional nature, "that you slipped her entire roll to a girl, and explain, as you will have to explain, that she was an extraordinarily pretty girl—a girl, in fine, who looked like something out of a beauty chorus of the better sort, I should think she would pluck down one of the ancestral battle-axes from the wall and jolly well strike you on the mazzard."

"Have no anxiety, my dear boy," said Lord Ickenham. "It is like your kind heart to be so concerned, but have no anxiety. I shall tell her that I was compelled to give the money to you to enable you to buy back some compromising letters from a Spanish *demi-mondaine*. She will scarcely be able to blame me for rescuing a fondly-loved nephew from the clutches of an adventuress. It may be that she will feel a little vexed with you for a while, and that you may have to allow a certain time to elapse before you visit Ickenham again, but then I shan't be wanting you at Ickenham till the ratting season starts, so all is well."

At this moment, there came toddling up to the gate of The Cedars a large red-faced man. He was just going in when Lord Ickenham hailed him.

"Mr. Roddis?"

"Hey?"

"Am I addressing Mr. Roddis?"

"That's me."

"I am Mr. J. G. Bulstrode from down the road," said Lord Ickenham. "This is my sister's husband's brother, Percy Frensham, in the lard and imported-butter business."

The red-faced bird said he was pleased to meet them. He asked Pongo if things were brisk in the lard and imported-butter business, and Pongo said they were all right and the red-faced bird said he was glad to hear it.

"We have never met, Mr. Roddis," said Lord Ickenham, "but I think it would be only neighborly to inform you that a short while ago I observed two suspicious-looking persons in your house."

"In my house? How on earth did they get there?"

"No doubt through a window at the back. They looked to me like cat burglars. If you creep up, you may be able to see them."

The red-faced bird crept, and came back not exactly foaming at the mouth but with the air of a man who for two pins would so foam.

"You're perfectly right. They're sitting in my parlor as cool as dammit, swigging my tea and buttered toast."

"I thought as much."

"And they've opened a pot of my raspberry jam."

"Ah, then you will be able to catch them red-handed. I should fetch a policeman."

"I will. Thank you, Mr. Bulstrode."

"Only too glad to have been able to render you this little service, Mr. Roddis," said Lord Ickenham. "Well, I must be moving along. I have an appointment. Pleasant after the rain, is it not? Come, Percy."

He lugged Pongo off.

"So that," he said, with satisfaction, "is that. On these visits of mine to the metropolis, my boy, I always make it my aim, if possible, to spread sweetness and light. I look about me, even in a foul hole like Mitching Hill, and I ask myself—How can I leave this foul hole a better and happier foul hole than I found it? And

if I see a chance, I grab it. Here is our omnibus. Spring aboard, my boy, and on our way home we will be sketching our rough plans for the evening. If the old Leicester Grill is still in existence, we might look in there. It must be fully thirty-five years since I was last thrown out of the Leicester Grill. I wonder who is the bouncer there now."

Such (concluded the Crumpet) is Pongo Twistleton's Uncle Fred from the country, and you will have gathered by now a rough notion of why it is that when a telegram comes announcing his impending arrival in the great city Pongo blanches to the core and calls for a couple of quick ones.

The whole situation, Pongo says, is very complex. Looking at it from one angle, it is fine that the man lives in the country most of the year. If he didn't, he would have him in his midst all the time. On the other hand, by living in the country he generates, as it were, a store of loopiness which expends itself with frightful violence on his rare visits to the centre of things.

What it boils down to is this—Is it better to have a loopy uncle whose loopiness is perpetually on tap but spread out thin, so to speak, or one who lies low in distant Hants for three hundred and sixty days in the year and does himself proud in London for the other five? Dashed moot, of course, and Pongo has never been able to make up his mind on the point.

Naturally, the ideal thing would be if someone would chain the old hound up permanently and keep him from Jan. One to Dec. Thirty-one where he wouldn't do any harm—viz. among the spuds and tenantry. But this, Pongo admits, is a Utopian dream. Nobody could work harder to that end than his Aunt Jane, and she has never been able to manage it.

JAMES R. ULLMAN

Summit of the World: The Fight for Everest

IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON of June 8, 1924, a man stood on a crag in the freezing sub-stratosphere, 26,000 feet above the sea, raised his eyes and stared. On a ridge high overhead he saw two human figures, black and tiny against the sky. Less than 800 feet above them was the snow-plumed summit of the highest mountain on earth. A minute, two minutes the watcher gazed, while the climbers crept upward. Then clouds swept in upon the mountain-top, blotting them from view.

They were never seen again.

So ended the most splendid and tragic of many attempts to conquer Everest, king of mountains. To this day no one knows whether George Leigh Mallory and Andrew Irvine reached the top before death overtook them. No one, probably, will ever know. One thing is certain: no man has ever reached the summit and returned to tell the tale.

The story of Mount Everest begins in 1852, when a clerk in the office of the Indian Trigonometrical Survey looked up excitedly from a page of figures and cried to his superior, "Sir, I have discovered the highest mountain in the world!" A careful checking of his calculations proved him right. The remote Himalayan summit listed prosaically on the charts as "Peak XV" was found to be

29,002 feet high—almost a thousand feet higher than its closest rival. Later observers corrected its altitude to 29,141 feet and named it for Sir George Everest, first Surveyor-General of India. But its supremacy remained, and remains today, unchallenged.

What began as an exercise in higher mathematics was to become, as years passed, one of the great adventures of the human spirit.

* * *

On May 1, 1922, the first Mount Everest climbing expedition pitched its base camp within sight of the great lamasery near the snout of the Rongbuk Glacier. It was composed of thirteen Englishmen, sixty hillmen from Nepal and northern India, a hundred-odd Tibetan helpers and more than three hundred pack animals—a veritable army in miniature. Remote and isolated Tibet had not witnessed such a sight in the thousands of years of its history.

In the preceding year the purpose had been to explore, reconnoitre and learn. Now, however, all else was to be subordinated to one great purpose: to reach the top of Everest. To this end, the personnel of the party had been almost completely changed, with only Mallory and Morshead remaining from the original group. The new leader was Brigadier-General Charles G. Bruce, a veteran of the British army in India and a far-ranging Himalayan explorer over a period of many years. Colonel E. T. Strutt, another noted mountaineer, was second in command, and Dr. T. E. Longstaff, although now too old for the highest climbing, was on hand to lend the benefit of his wide experience. The others included Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Norton, Dr. T. Howard Somervell and Dr. Wakefield; Captains Geoffrey Bruce, George Finch and C. G. Morris; C. G. Crawford, of the India Civil Service; and, as official photographer, Captain John Noel. Of these, Norton, Somervell and Finch were climbers in the prime of their careers and were expected, together with Mallory, to make the final bid for the summit.

The climbing of a great mountain is far more than a matter of putting one foot in front of the other and moving uphill. Indeed, in the case of a giant like Everest, climbing in itself may be said to be of merely secondary importance. Two-thirds of the 1922 ex-

pedition's battles had to be fought before a single man set foot on the mountain proper.

First, there was the all-important problem of weather. No man, to be sure, could hope to prophesy the day-by-day variations of calm and storm in those wild Himalayan uplands, but the observations of the previous year had convinced everyone concerned that Everest was climbable, if at all, only during a very brief period of the year. Until early May the whole region was locked in savage, blizzard-driven winter; after the middle of June the eastern Himalayas received the full brunt of the Indian monsoon and remained through the summer a death-trap of snow and sleet and rotten, melting ice. A period of only some six weeks intervened in which the climbers might hope for reasonably clear skies, a minimum of wind and at least a fighting chance for success. It was therefore not accident, but careful planning, that brought the 1922 expedition to the skirts of Everest on May first. Their next great task was to get onto the mountain itself as quickly as possible. The race with the monsoon was on.

For two long weeks climbers and porters crept back and forth along the vast northern glaciers, transporting food, supplies and equipment. Mallory, in an analysis of the problems of Everest, had likened a climbing expedition to a ladder, in which the higher rungs were useless unless the rungs below were dependable and strong. It was these lower rungs which now had to be fashioned—a chain of camps, not more than an easy day's march apart, extending as high as human strength could take them. Camp I was pitched between the Rongbuk and East Rongbuk Glaciers, in the narrow defile which Mallory had missed the previous year. Camp II was established halfway up the East Rongbuk Glacier, and Camp III near its head, close by the eastern wall of the North Col. The older and less acclimatized members of the party were left behind to staff and maintain communication between these lower stations, while the stronger climbers and porters proceeded to the establishment of Camp IV on top of the col.

This in itself was a feat more difficult than the ascent to the summit of a lesser mountain. Mallory and Somervell led the way,

chopping countless steps in the glaring ice-cliffs, edging their way around bottomless, dark crevasses and snow-masses as vast as toppled buildings. The porters followed, straining on the ropes, scarcely more than creeping under their heavy loads. On their return to civilization the Everesters were unanimous in declaring that without these sturdy Sherpas from the hill country of northern India their assault on the mountain would have bogged down before it even began. Unlike the Tibetans, who refused even to set foot on Chomolungma, the haunted mountain, these men climbed doggedly and cheerfully to heights where no men had ever stood before and in 1924 achieved the almost incredible feat of carrying packs and establishing a camp at an altitude of more than 27,000 feet. "Tigers," the Englishmen called them, and they richly deserved the name.

With a huddle of tiny green tents established on the col, the assault on Everest proper was at last at hand. Mallory, Somervell, Norton and Morshead were selected for the first attempt, and at dawn on May twentieth, accompanied by a group of the strongest porters, they set out for the unknown, untrodden heights. The cold was almost unendurable; the wild west wind roared down upon them like an invisible avalanche; and their goal was still a mile above them, remote and tantalizing in the sky. But their hopes and hearts were high. "No end," wrote Mallory, "was visible or even conceivable to this kingdom of adventure!"

Hour after hour the climbers toiled up the northeast ridge. The going underfoot was not technically difficult, but constant care was necessary to guard against a slip on the steep, ice-coated slabs. The wind tore at them relentlessly, and, worse yet, as they ascended it grew more difficult to breathe. Later expeditions were to learn an important lesson from their ordeal and allow themselves more time for acclimatization before storming the almost oxygenless heights.

They had hoped to pitch their highest camp close under the northeast shoulder, but at 25,000 feet cold and exhaustion forced a halt. Sending their faithful "tigers" down to Camp IV they pitched their two tiny tents in as sheltered a spot as they could find

and crawled into their sleeping bags. All night they lay there, while the wind howled and the mercury in their thermometers dropped to seven degrees above zero.

At first daylight they were moving upward again through thick mist and gusts of windblown snow. After an hour's climbing Morshead reached the limit of his endurance and had to turn back, but Mallory, Somervell and Norton still struggled on. Their progress consisted of fifteen or twenty minutes' slow, painful climbing, a long rest, another period of climbing, another rest. Before long their hands and feet grew numb and their mouths hung wide open, gasping for air. Even their minds and senses, they reported later, were affected by oxygen starvation: ambition, judgment and will disappeared, and they moved forward mechanically, like men in a trance.

By mid-afternoon they had reached a height of 27,000 feet. They had ascended two-thirds of the vertical distance between the North Col and the summit and were a full 2400 feet higher than any man had ever stood before. Physically they could have gone even farther, but to have done so at that late hour, without food or shelter, would have been suicidal. Too exhausted to feel disappointment, or any other emotion, they turned their backs on their goal and began the descent.

As it was they were lucky to return to their companions alive. At Camp V they found Morshead so crippled by frostbite that he had almost to be carried down to the col. Then, crossing a steep snow-slope lower down, one of them slipped, and the four were carried to the very brink of the precipitous north face before Mallory succeeded in jamming his ax into the snow and holding the rope fast. As a crowning misfortune, night overtook them before they reached the col, and it was past midnight when at last they groped their way into their tents.

The same day that the first attempt ended in heroic failure, the second was launched. The climbers now were Finch, Geoffrey Bruce and Tejber Bura, a Gurkha corporal who had proved himself a first-class mountaineer. Captain Noel ascended with them to the North Col camp, where he remained in reserve, and twelve porters set up a fifth camp for them at 25,500 feet—a full 500 feet higher

than where Mallory and his companions had bivouacked a few nights before. This headstart for the final dash, added to the advantage that they were supplied with tanks of oxygen to aid their breathing, gave the second party high hopes of success.

They were hopes, however, that were to be quickly shattered. No sooner had Finch, Bruce and Tejbir crawled into their tent for the night than a blizzard swooped down upon the mountain. For more than twenty-four hours the wind shrieked, the snow drove down in an almost solid mass, and the climbers struggled desperately with ripping canvas and breaking guy-ropes. It was little less than a miracle that men, tent and all were not blown bodily off the mountain into the mile-deep gulfs below.

After two nights and a day the weather at last cleared, and the climbers made their delayed start in a still, frozen dawn. At 26,000 feet Tejbir collapsed and had to return to the tent, Finch and Bruce continuing. The oxygen which they carried spared them the tortures which their predecessors had endured, but this advantage was more than nullified by the thirty pounds of tank and apparatus which each carried on his back. Worse than this, Bruce's apparatus was almost the cause of his death, for without warning, at an altitude of about 26,500 feet, something went wrong with it and the flow of oxygen stopped. Accustomed by then to artificial breathing, Bruce would have been able to live for only a few minutes without it. Finch, however, quickly connected Bruce's mouthpiece to his own tank, and between them they were able to make the necessary repairs.

Hoping to escape the full brunt of the wind, they left the north-east ridge a few hundred feet below the shoulder and headed diagonally upward across the smooth slabs and powdered snow of Everest's north face. They made remarkable progress and by mid-day had gained a point only half a mile from the summit and a scant 1900 feet below it. But here they reached the end of their tether. Their bodies and brains were numb; their limbs were ceasing to function and their eyes to focus; each additional foot upward would probably be a foot that they could never return. They turned back defeated, like their companions before them, but in defeat they had set a new world's climbing record of 27,235 feet.

One more attempt the expedition of 1922 was to make. It was doomed to be the most short lived and disastrous one that has ever been made against the king of mountains.

The dreaded monsoon came early that year, and already in the first days of June dark banks of clouds appeared above the mountains to the south and the snow fell in billowing drifts on the upper slopes of Everest. A final thrust, if it were to be made at all, must be made quickly.

The main base, at which the whole expedition now gathered, resembled a field hospital more than a mountaineers' camp; of the high climbers only Mallory and Somervell were fit for further work. Resolved on a last try, however, they again pushed up the glaciers and, with Crawford, Wakefield and a squad of porters helping, resumed the laborious task of packing supplies up to the North Col. A night of sub zero temperature had apparently solidified the fresh snow on the great wall, and they had reason to believe the going would be comparatively easy.

Starting early one morning from Camp III, Mallory, Somervell, Crawford and fourteen heavily loaded porters began the ascent. The Englishmen were on one rope, cutting steps and leading the way; three roped groups of porters followed. All went well until they had reached a point some 600 feet below the summit of the col. Then suddenly they were startled by a deep rumbling sound beneath them. An instant later there was a dull, ominous explosion, and the rampart of snow and ice to which they clung seemed to shudder along its entire face. An ocean of soft, billowing snow poured down upon them, knocked them from their feet and swept them away.

By miraculous good fortune, Mallory, Somervell and Crawford were not in the direct path of the avalanche. Caught by its flank, they were carried down a distance of some fifty feet; but by striking out like swimmers they were at last able to struggle to the surface and gain a secure foothold. Not so the unfortunate porters. Struck by the full force of the snowslide, they were catapulted down the steep slope to the lip of a sheer ice-wall below. A moment before there had been a gaping crevasse beneath the wall; now it was filled by the avalanche. Hurting over the brink, the porters

plunged into the soft, hissing sea of snow, disappearing from sight one by one as thousands of more tons poured down after them.

Grim and heroic work was carried out on the ice-wall that day. Hour after hour the climbers floundered through the great drifts, burrowing, straining at ropes, expending their last reserve of strength to find and rescue the buried porters. One or two they found almost uninjured. A few more, who at first appeared dead from suffocation, they were able to revive. But seven were beyond help. To this day their bodies lie entombed in the snow and ice beneath the North Col, tragic victims of the wrath of the greatest mountain.

So the 1922 attack on Everest ended, not only in defeat but in disaster. Any further attempt on the peak that year was unthinkable, and it was a silent, saddened band of mountaineers who, a few days later, began the long trek across Tibet toward India and home. Behind them the summit of the greatest mountain loomed white and lonely in the sky, its snow-plume streaming in the wild west wind.

The curtain drops for two years on Chomolungma, Goddess-Mother-of-the-World. No expedition was sent out in 1923, but the struggle was by no means at an end. The Mount Everest Committee continued with its work—planning, financing, organizing—and in late March of 1924 a third expedition set out from Darjeeling on the high, wild trail to the heart of the Himalayas. Before it returned it was destined to write the most famous chapter in the history of mountaineering.

Several of the old Everesters were back again in harness: the indefatigable Mallory of course; Somervell, Norton and Geoffrey Bruce; Noel with his cameras. General Bruce had again been appointed leader, but early in the march through Tibet he was stricken with malaria and had to return to India while Norton carried on as first-in-command. New recruits included N. E. Odell, the geologist, who twelve years later was to reach the top of Nanda Devi; E. O. Shebbeare, of the Indian Forest Service, as transport officer; Major R. W. G. Hingston as physician; Beetham and Hazard, both experienced mountaineers, and Andrew Irvine,

young and powerful Oxford oarsman. In addition to these were the usual retinue of native porters and helpers, among them many of the veteran "tigers" from the 1922 attempt. Almost three hundred men, all told, were in the party when at the end of April it set up its base camp beside the great moraines of the now familiar Rongbuk Glacier.

The preliminary moves of the campaign were carried out according to the same plan as before—but more methodically and rapidly. The first three advance camps were established a day's march apart on the glaciers, and within two weeks the advance guard was ready to tackle the North Col. The whole organization was functioning like an oiled machine; there were no accidents or illness, and the weather was fine. According to their schedule they would be on the northeast ridge by the middle of May and have almost a full month for climbing before the arrival of the monsoon. Even the most sceptical among them, staring eagerly at the heights above, could not but believe that Everest at last was theirs.

This time, however, misfortune struck even before they reached the mountain.

Scarcely had Camp III been set up below the col than a blizzard swept down from the north, wrecking everything in its path, turning camps and communication lines into a shambles. The porters, many of them caught unprepared and without adequate clothing or shelter, suffered terribly from exposure and exhaustion. Two of them died. The climbers, who were supposed to be conserving their energies for the great effort higher up, wore themselves out in their efforts to save men and supplies. Two weeks after the vanguard had left the base camp, full of strength and optimism, they were back again where they started, frostbitten, battered and fagged out.

A major blow had been dealt their chances for success, but the Everesters pulled in their belts and went at it again. The porters' drooping spirits were raised by a blessing from the Holy Lama of the Rongbuk Monastery, and a few days later a second assault was begun. At the beginning all went well, and the three glacier camps were re-established and provisioned in short order. But trouble

began again on the great ice-wall beneath the North Col. The storms and avalanches of two years had transformed the thousand-foot face into a wild slanting chaos of cliffs and chasms. No vestige of their former route remained.

Then followed days of killing labor. Thousands of steps had to be chopped in the ice and snow. An almost perpendicular chimney, a hundred feet high, had to be negotiated. Ladders and ropes had to be installed so that the porters could come up with their loads. There were many narrow escapes from disaster, notably on one occasion when Mallory, descending the wall alone, plunged through a snow-bridge into a gaping hole beneath. Luckily his ice-ax jammed against the sides of the crevasse after he had fallen only ten feet, for below him was only blue-black space. As it was, his companions were all too far away to hear his shouts for help and he was barely able to claw his way upward to the surface snow and safety.

At last, however, the route up the wall was completed. The body of climbers retired to Camp III, at its foot, for a much-needed rest, leaving Hazard and twelve porters in the newly established camp on the col. During the night the mercury fell to twenty-four below zero and at dawn a heavy snowfall began; but Geoffrey Bruce and Odell nevertheless decided to ascend to the col. They did not get far. Halfway up they encountered Hazard and eight of the porters coming down. They were near collapse after the night of frightful cold and wind on the exposed col. Worse yet, four of the porters were still up above, having absolutely refused to budge downward over the treacherous fresh snow of the chimney.

A sombre council of war ensued at Camp III. Snow and wind were now driving down the mountain in wild blasts, and it was obvious that the marooned men could not survive for long. All plans had to be set aside and every effort devoted to getting them down.

What followed constitutes one of the most remarkable and courageous rescues in mountaineering annals. Mallory, Norton and Somervell, the three outstanding climbers of the expedition, fought their way up the ice-wall and came out at last upon a steep snow-slope a short distance below the top and immediately above a gap-

ing crevasse. At the top of the slope the porters huddled, half dead from exposure, but afraid to move. The snow between them and the rescuing party was loose and powdery, liable to crumble away at any moment.

At this point Somervell insisted on taking the lead. Roping up, he crept toward the porters along the upper lip of the crevasse, while Mallory and Norton payed out behind him. But the rope's two hundred feet were not enough, when he had reached its end he was still ten yards short of the men. There was nothing for it but that they must risk the unbridged stretch on their own. After long persuasion two of them began edging across. And made it. Somervell passed them along the rope to Mallory and Norton. Then the other two started over, but at their first step the snow gave way and they began sliding toward the abyss below. Only a patch of solid snow saved them. They brought up at the very edge of the crevasse, gasping, shaken, unable to move an inch.

Now Somervell called into action all his superb talents as a mountaineer. He jammed his ice-ax into the snow and, untying the rope from his waist, passed it around the ax and strained it to its fullest length. Then he lowered himself down the slope until he was clinging to its last strands with one hand. With the other he reached out and, while the snow shuddered ominously underfoot, seized each porter in turn by the scruff of the neck and hauled him up to safety. Within a few hours climbers and porters were back in Camp III, all of them still alive, but little more.

After this harrowing experience a few days' rest at lower altitudes was absolutely necessary, and for the second time in two weeks the Everesters found themselves driven back to the base camp. Their situation could scarcely have been more discouraging. They had planned to be on the northeast ridge by the middle of May, and now it was already June and no man had yet set foot on the mountain proper. In another ten days, at most, the monsoon would blow in and all hopes of success would be gone. They must strike hard and strike fast, or go down again to defeat.

The next week witnessed climbing such as the world had never seen before.

The plan called for an assault in continuous waves, each climb-

ing party consisting of two men, each attempt to begin the day after the preceding one. The base of operations was to be Camp IV on the North Col. Camp V was to be set up on the ridge, near the site of the 1922 bivouac, and a sixth camp higher yet—as near to the summit as the porters could possibly take it. The climbers believed that the establishment of Camp VI was the key to the ascent; the experiences of the previous expedition had convinced them that the top could be reached only if the final “dash” were reduced to not more than 2000 feet. In the first fine weather they had experienced in weeks the band of determined men struggled back up the glaciers.

Mallory and Geoffrey Bruce were chosen for the first attack. With Odell, Irvine and nine porters they reached the North Col safely, spent the night there, and the next morning struck out up the ridge, accompanied by eight of the “tigers.” Odell, Irvine and one helper remained on the col in support. The climbers made good progress the first day and set up their tents at 25,300 feet—a mere 200 feet lower than the highest camp of 1922. A night of zero cold and shrieking wind, however, was too much for the porters, and the next morning no amount of persuasion would induce them to go higher. Seething with frustration, Mallory and Bruce were forced to descend with them.

Meanwhile the second team of Norton and Somervell had started up from the col, according to plan. They passed the first party on its way down, reached Camp V and spent the night there. In the morning their porters, too, refused at first to go on, but after four solid hours of urging three of them at last agreed to make a try. The work they subsequently did that day has seldom been matched anywhere for endurance, courage and loyalty. Step by gasping step they struggled upward with their packs—freezing, leaden-footed, choking for air—until at last Camp VI was pitched at the amazing altitude of 26,800 feet. Their task completed, they then descended to the North Col, to be hailed as heroes by all below: Lhakpa Chede, Napoo Yishay and Semchumbi, greatest of all “tigers.”

That night Norton and Somervell slept in a single tiny tent, higher than men had ever slept before. Their hearts now were pounding with more than the mere physical strain of their exer-

tions: the long dreamed-of summit loomed in the darkness only 2300 feet above them; victory was at last within their reach. Carefully, for the hundredth time, they reviewed their plans for the final day. There were two opinions in the expedition as to the best route to be followed. Mallory and some of the others were in favor of ascending straight to the northeast shoulder and then following the crest of the main east ridge to the base of the summit pyramid. Norton and Somervell, however, believed that by keeping a few hundred feet below the ridge they would not only find easier climbing, but also escape the full fury of the west wind; and it was this route that they now determined to take.

Dawn of the next day broke clear and still. By full sunrise they were on their way, creeping upward and to the west over steeply tilted, snow-powdered slabs. As they had hoped, they were protected from the wind, but the cold was bitter and both men coughed and gasped in the thin, freezing air. They could take only a dozen steps in succession before pausing to rest. While moving, they were forced to take from four to ten breaths for each single step. Yet they kept going for five hours: to 27,000 feet—27,500—28,000—

At noon Somervell succumbed. His throat was a throbbing knot of pain and it was only by the most violent effort that he was able to breathe at all. Another few minutes of the ordeal would have been the end of him. Sinking down on a small ledge in a paroxysm of coughing, he gestured to his companion to go alone.

With the last ounce of his strength Norton tried. An hour's climbing brought him to a great couloir, or gully, which cuts the upper slopes of Everest between the summit pyramid and the precipices of the north face below. The couloir was filled with soft, loose snow, and a slip would have meant a 10,000-foot plunge to the Rongbuk Glacier. Norton crossed it safely, but, clinging feebly to the ledges on the far side, he knew that the game was up. His head and heart were pounding as if any moment they might literally explode. In addition, he had begun to see double, and his leaden feet would no longer move where his will directed them. In his clouded consciousness he was just able to realize that to climb farther would be to die.

For a few moments Norton stood motionless. He sat at an altitude of 28,126 feet—higher than any man had ever stood before; so high that the greatest mountain range on earth, spreading endlessly to the horizon, seemed flattened out beneath him. Only a few yards above him began the culminating pyramid of Everest. To his aching eyes it seemed to present an easy slope—a mere thousand feet of almost snow-free slanting rock beckoning him upward to the shining goal. If only his body possessed the strength of his will; if only he were more than human—

Somehow Norton and Somervell got down the terrible slopes of Everest. By nine-thirty that night they were back in the North Col camp in the ministering hands of their companions, safe, but more dead than alive. Somervell was a seriously sick man. Norton was suffering the tortures of snow-blindness and did not regain his sight for several days. Both had given all they had. That it was not enough is surely no reflection on two of the most determined and courageous mountaineers who ever lived.

Norton and Somervell's assault was the next-to-last in the adventure of 1924. One more was to come—and, with it, mystery and tragedy.

Bitterly chagrined at the failure of his first effort, Mallory was determined to have one last fling before the monsoon struck. Everest was *his* mountain, more than any other man's. He had pioneered the way to it and blazed the trail to its heights; his flaming spirit had been the principal driving force behind each assault; the conquest of the summit was the great dream of his life. His companions, watching him now, realized that he was preparing for his mightiest effort.

Mallory moved with characteristic speed. With young Andrew Irvine as partner he started upward from the col the day after Norton and Somervell had descended. They spent the first night at Camp V and the second at Camp VI, at 26,800 feet. Unlike Norton and Somervell, they planned to use oxygen on the final dash and to follow the crest of the northeast ridge instead of traversing the north face to the couloir. The ridge appeared to present more formidable climbing difficulties than the lower route, par-

ticularly near the base of the summit pyramid where it buckled upward in two great rock-towers which the Everesters called the First and Second Steps. Mallory, however, was all for the frontal attack and had frequently expressed the belief that the steps could be surmounted. The last "tigers" descending that night from the highest camp to the col brought word that both climbers were in good condition and full of hope for success.

One man only was to have another glimpse of Mallory and Irvine.

On the morning of June eighth—the day set for the assault on the summit—Odell, the geologist, who had spent the night alone at Camp V, set out for Camp VI with a rucksack of food. The day was as warm and windless as any the expedition had experienced, but a thin gray mist clung to the upper reaches of the mountain, and Odell could see little of what lay above him. Presently however, he scaled the top of a small crag at about 26,000 feet, and, standing there, he stopped and stared. For a moment the mist cleared. The whole summit ridge and final pyramid of Everest were unveiled, and high above him, on the very crest of the ridge, he saw two tiny figures outlined against the sky. They appeared to be at the base of one of the great steps, not more than seven or eight hundred feet below the final pinnacle. As Odell watched, the figures moved slowly upward. Then, as suddenly as it had parted, the mist closed in again, and they were gone.

The feats of endurance that Odell performed during the next forty-eight hours are unsurpassed by those of any mountaineer. That same day he went to Camp VI with his load of provisions, and then even higher, watching and waiting. But the mountaintop remained veiled in mist and there was no sign of the climbers returning. As night came on, he descended all the way to the col, only to start off again the following dawn. Camp V was empty. He spent a solitary night there in sub-zero cold and the next morning ascended again to Camp VI. It was empty too. With sinking heart he struggled upward for another thousand feet, searching and shouting, to the very limit of human endurance. The only answering sound was the deep moaning of the wind. The great peak above him loomed bleakly in the sky, wrapped in the loneliness

and desolation of the ages. All hope was gone. Odell descended to the highest camp and signalled the tidings of tragedy to the watchers far below.

So ended the second attempt on Everest—and, with it, the lives of two brave men. The bodies of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine lie somewhere in the vast wilderness of rock and ice that guards the summit of the world. Where and how death overtook them no one knows. And whether victory came before the end no one knows either. Our last glimpse of them is through Odell's eyes—two tiny specks against the sky, fighting upward.

The rest is mystery.

STEWART EDWARD WHITE

The Two-Gun Man

BUCK JOHNSON WAS AMERICAN BORN, but with a black beard and a dignity of manner that had earned him the title of Señor. He had drifted into southeastern Arizona in the days of Cochise and Victorio and Geronimo. He had persisted, and so in time had come to control the water—and hence the grazing—of nearly all the Soda Springs Valley. His troubles were many, and his difficulties great. There were the ordinary problems of lean and dry years. There were also the extraordinary problems of devastating Apaches; rivals for early and ill-defined range rights—and cattle-rustlers.

Señor Buck Johnson was a man of capacity, courage, directness of method, and perseverance. Especially the latter. Therefore he had survived to see the Apaches subdued, the range rights adjusted, his cattle increased to thousands, grazing the area of a principality. Now, all the energy and fire of his frontiersman's nature he had turned to wiping out the third uncertainty of an uncertain business. He found it a task of some magnitude.

For Señor Buck Johnson lived just north of that terra incognita filled with the mystery of a double chance of death from man or the flaming desert known as the Mexican border. There, by natural gravitation, gathered all the desperate characters of three States and two republics. He who rode into it took good care that no one should ride behind him, lived warily, slept light, and breathed

deep when once he had again sighted the familiar peaks of Cochise's Stronghold. No one professed knowledge of those who dwelt therein. They moved, mysterious as the desert illusions that compassed them about. As you rode, the ranges of mountains visibly changed form, the monstrous, snaky, sea-like growths of the cactus clutched at your stirrup, mock lakes sparkled and dissolved in the middle distance, the sun beat hot and merciless, the powdered dry alkali beat hotly and mercilessly back—and strange, grim men, swarthy, bearded, heavily armed, with red-rimmed unshifting eyes, rode silently out of the mists of illusion to look on you steadily, and then to ride silently back into the desert haze. They might be only the herders of the gaunt cattle, or again they might belong to the Lost Legion that peopled the country. All you could know was that of the men who entered in, but few returned.

Directly north of this unknown land you encountered parallel fences running across the country. They enclosed nothing, but offered a check to the cattle drifting toward the clutch of the renegades, and an obstacle to swift, dashing forays.

Of cattle-rustling there are various forms. The boldest consists quite simply of running off a bunch of stock, hustling it over the Mexican line, and there selling it to some of the big Sonora ranch owners. Generally this sort means war. Also are there subtler means, grading in skill from the rebranding through a wet blanket, through the crafty refashioning of a brand to the various methods of separating the cow from her unbranded calf. In the course of his task Señor Buck Johnson would have to do with them all, but at present he existed in a state of warfare, fighting an enemy who stole as the Indians used to steal.

Already he had fought two pitched battles, and had won them both. His cattle increased, and he became rich. Nevertheless he knew that constantly his resources were being drained. Time and again he and his new Texas foreman, Jed Parker, had followed the trail of a stampeded bunch of twenty or thirty, followed them on down through the Soda Springs Valley to the cut drift fences, there to abandon them. For, as yet, an armed force would be needed to penetrate the borderland. Once he and his men had experienced the glory of a night pursuit. Then, at the drift fences, he

had fought one of his battles. But it was impossible adequately to patrol all parts of a range bigger than some Eastern States.

Buck Johnson did his best, but it was like stopping with sands the innumerable little leaks of a dam. Did his riders watch toward the Chiricahuas, then a score of beef steers disappeared from Grant's Pass forty miles away. Pursuit here meant leaving cattle unguarded there. It was useless, and the Señor soon perceived that sooner or later he must strike in offence.

For this purpose he began slowly to strengthen the forces of his riders. Men were coming in from Texas. They were good men, addicted to the grass-rope, the double cinch, and the ox-bow stirrup. Señor Johnson wanted men who could shoot, and he got them.

"Jed," said Señor Johnson to his foreman, "the next son-of-a-gun that rustles any of our cows is sure loading himself full of trouble. We'll hit his trail and will stay with it, and we'll reach his cattle-rustling conscience with a rope."

So it came about that a little army crossed the drift fences and entered the border country. Two days later it came out, and mighty pleased to be able to do so. The rope had not been used.

The reason for the defeat was quite simple. The thief had run his cattle through the lava beds where the trail at once became difficult to follow. This delayed the pursuing party; they ran out of water, and, as there was among them not one man well enough acquainted with the country to know where to find more, they had to return.

"No use, Buck," said Jed. "We'd any of us come in on a gun play, but we can't buck the desert. We'll have to get someone who knows the country."

"That's all right—but where?" queried Johnson.

"There's Pereza," suggested Parker. "It's the only town down near that country."

"Might get someone there," agreed the Señor.

Next day he rode away in search of a guide. The third evening he was back again, much discouraged.

"The country's no good," he explained. "The regular inhabitants're a set of Mexican bums and old soaks. The cowmen's all

from North and don't know nothing more than we do. I found lots who claimed to know that country, but when I told 'em what I wanted they shied like a colt. I couldn't hire 'em, for no money, to go down in that country. They ain't got the nerve. I took two days to her, too, and rode out to a ranch where they said a man lived who knew all about it down there. Nary ruffle. Man looked all right, but his tail went down like the rest when I told him what we wanted. Seemed plumb scairt to death. Says he lives too close to the gang. Says they'd wipe him out sure if he done it. Seemed plumb *scairt*." Buck Johnson grinned. "I told him so and he got hosstyle right off. Didn't seem no ways scairt of me. I don't know what's the matter with that outfit down there. They're plumb terrorized."

That night a bunch of steers was stolen from the very corrals of the home ranch. The home ranch was far north, near Fort Sherman itself, and so had always been considered immune from attack. Consequently these steers were very fine ones.

For the first time Buck Johnson lost his head and his dignity. He ordered the horses.

"I'm going to follow that — — into Sonora," he shouted to Jed Parker. "This thing's got to stop!"

"You can't make her, Buck," objected the foreman. "You'll get held up by the desert, and, if that don't finish you, they'll tangle you up in all those little mountains down there, and ambush you, and massacre you. You know it damn well."

"I don't give a —," exploded Señor Johnson, "if they do. No man can slap my face and not get a run for it."

Jed Parker communed with himself.

"Señor," said he, at last, "it's no good; you can't do it. You got to have a guide. You wait three days and I'll get you one."

"You can't do it," insisted the Señor. "I tried every man in the district."

"Will you wait three days?" repeated the foreman.

Johnson pulled loose his latigo. His first anger had cooled.

"All right," he agreed, "and you can say for me that I'll pay five thousand dollars in gold and give all the men and horses he needs to the man who has the nerve to get back that bunch of cattle,

and bring in the man who rustled them. I'll sure make this a test case."

So Jed Parker set out to discover his man with nerve.

At about ten o'clock of the Fourth of July a rider topped the summit of the last swell of land, and loped his animal down into the single street of Pereza. The buildings on either side were flat-roofed and coated with plaster. Over the sidewalks extended wooden awnings, beneath which opened very wide doors into the coolness of saloons. Each of these places ran a bar, and also games of roulette, faro, craps, and stud poker. Even this early in the morning every game was patronized.

The day was already hot with the dry, breathless, but exhilarating, heat of the desert. A throng of men idling at the edge of the sidewalks, jostling up and down their center, or eddying into the places of amusement, acknowledged the power of summer by loosening their collars, carrying their coats on their arms. They were as yet busily engaged in recognizing acquaintances. Later they would drink freely and gamble, and perhaps fight. Toward all but those whom they recognized they preserved an attitude of potential suspicion, for here were gathered the "bad men" of the border countries. A certain jealousy or touchy egotism lest the other man be considered quicker on the trigger, bolder, more aggressive than himself, kept each strung to tension. An occasional shot attracted little notice. Men in the cow-countries shoot as casually as we strike matches, and some subtle instinct told them that the reports were harmless.

As the rider entered the one street, however, a more definite cause of excitement drew the loose population toward the center of the road. Immediately their mass blotted out what had interested them. Curiosity attracted the saunterers; then in turn the frequenters of the bars and gambling games. In a very few moments the barkeepers, gamblers, and look-out men, held aloof only by the necessities of their calling, alone of all the population of Pereza were not included in the newly-formed ring.

The stranger pushed his horse resolutely to the outer edge of the

crowd where, from his point of vantage, he could easily overlook their heads. He was a quiet-appearing young fellow, rather neatly dressed in the border costume, rode a "center fire," or single-cinch, saddle, and wore no chaps. He was what is known as a "two-gun man": that is to say, he wore a heavy Colt's revolver on either hip. The fact that the lower ends of his holsters were tied down, in order to facilitate the easy withdrawal of the revolvers, seemed to indicate that he expected to use them. He had furthermore a quiet grey eye, with the glint of steel that bore out the influence of the tied holsters.

The newcomer dropped his reins on his pony's neck, eased himself to an attitude of attention, and looked down gravely on what was taking place.

He saw over the heads of the bystanders a tall, muscular, wild-eyed man, hatless, his hair rumpled into staring confusion, his right sleeve rolled to his shoulder, a wicked-looking nine-inch knife in his hand, and a red bandana handkerchief hanging by one corner from his teeth.

"What's biting the locoed stranger?" the young man inquired of his neighbor.

The other frowned at him darkly.

"Dares anyone to take the other end of that handkerchief in his teeth, and fight it out without letting go."

"Nice joyful proposition," commented the young man.

He settled himself to closer attention. The wild-eyed man was talking rapidly. What he said cannot be printed here. Mainly was it derogatory of the southern countries. Shortly it became boastful of the northern, and then of the man who uttered it. He swaggered up and down, becoming always the more insolent as his challenge remained untaken.

"Why don't you take him up?" inquired the young man, after a moment.

"Not me!" negatived the other vigorously. "I'll go your little old gunfight to a finish, but I don't want any cold steel in mine. Ugh! it gives me the shivers. It's a reg'lar Mexican trick! With a gun it's down and out, but this knife work is too slow and searchin'."

The newcomer said nothing, but fixed his eye again on the raging man with the knife.

"Don't you reckon he's bluffing?" he inquired.

"Not any!" denied the other with emphasis. "He's jest drunk enough to be crazy mad."

The newcomer shrugged his shoulders and cast his glance searchingly over the fringe of the crowd. It rested on a Mexican.

"Hi, Tony! Come here," he called.

The Mexican approached, flashing his white teeth.

"Here," said the stranger, "lend me your knife a minute."

The Mexican, anticipating sport of his own peculiar kind, obeyed with alacrity.

"You fellows make me tired," observed the stranger, dismounting. "He's got the whole townful of you bluffed to a standstill. Damn if I don't try his little game."

He hung his coat on his saddle, shouldered his way through the press, which parted for him readily, and picked up the other corner of the handkerchief.

"Now, you mangy son-of-a-gun," said he.

Jed Parker straightened his back, rolled up the bandana handkerchief, and thrust it into his pocket, hit flat with his hand the tousled mass of his hair, and thrust the long hunting knife into its sheath.

"You're the man I want," said he.

Instantly the two-gun man had jerked loose his weapons and was covering the foreman.

"*Am I!*" he snarled.

"Not jest that way," exclaimed Parker. "My gun is on my hoss, and you can have this old toad-sticker if you want it. I been looking for you and took this way of finding you. Now, let's go talk."

The stranger looked him in the eye for nearly a half minute without lowering his revolvers.

"I go you," said he briefly, at last.

But the crowd, missing the purport, and in fact the very occurrence of this colloquy, did not understand. It thought the bluff had been called, and naturally, finding harmless what had intimidated it, gave way to an exasperated impulse to get even.

"You — — — bluffer!" shouted a voice, "don't you think you can run any such ranikaboo here!"

Jed Parker turned humorously to his companion.

"Do we get that talk?" he inquired gently.

For answer the two-gun man turned and walked steadily in the direction of the man who had shouted. The latter's hand strayed uncertainly toward his own weapon, but the movement paused when the stranger's clear, steel eye rested on it.

"This gentleman," pointed out the two-gun man softly, "is an old friend of mine. Don't you get to calling of him names."

His eye swept the bystanders calmly.

"Come on, Jack," said he, addressing Parker.

On the outskirts he encountered the Mexican from whom he had borrowed the knife.

"Here, Tony," said he with a slight laugh, "here's a *peso*. You'll find your knife back there where I had to drop her."

He entered a saloon, nodded to the proprietor, and led the way through it to a box-like room containing a board table and two chairs.

"Make good," he commanded briefly.

"I'm looking for a man with nerve," explained Parker, with equal succinctness. "You're the man."

"Well?"

"Do you know the country south of here?"

The stranger's eyes narrowed.

"Proceed," said he.

"I'm foreman of the Lazy Y of Soda Springs Valley range," explained Parker. "I'm looking for a man with sand enough and *sabe* of the country enough to lead a posse after cattle rustlers into the border country."

"I live in this country," admitted the stranger.

"So do plenty of others, but their eyes stick out like two raw oysters when you mention the border country. Will you tackle it?"

"What's the proposition?"

"Come and see the old man. He'll put it to you."

They mounted their horses and rode the rest of the day. The desert compassed them about, marvellously changing shape and

color, and every character, with all the noiselessness of phantasmagoria. At evening the desert stars shone steady and unwinking, like the flames of candles. By moonrise they came to the home ranch.

The buildings and corrals lay dark and silent against the moonlight that made of the plain a sea of mist. The two men unsaddled their horses and turned them loose in the wire-fenced "pasture," the necessary noises of their movements sounding sharp and clear against the velvet hush of the night. After a moment they walked stiffly past the sheds and cook shanty, past the men's bunk houses, and the tall windmill silhouetted against the sky, to the main building of the home ranch under its great cottonwoods. There a light still burned, for this was the third day, and Buck Johnson awaited his foreman.

Jed Parker pushed in without ceremony.

"Here's your man, Buck," said he.

The stranger had stepped inside and carefully closed the door behind him. The lamplight threw into relief the bold, free lines of his face, the details of his costume powdered thick with alkali, the shiny butts of the two guns in their open holsters tied at the bottom. Equally it defined the resolute countenance of Buck Johnson turned up in inquiry. The two men examined each other—and liked each other at once.

"How are you?" greeted the cattleman.

"Good-evening," responded the stranger.

"Sit down," invited Buck Johnson.

The stranger perched gingerly on the edge of a chair, with an appearance less of embarrassment than of habitual alertness.

"You'll take the job?" inquired the Señor.

"I haven't heard what it is," replied the stranger.

"Parker here ——?"

"Said you'd explain."

"Very well," said Buck Johnson. He paused a moment, collecting his thoughts. "There's too much cattle-rustling here. I'm going to stop it. I've got good men here ready to take the job, but no one who knows the country south. Three days ago I had a bunch of cattle stolen right here from the home-ranch corrals, and by one

man, at that. It wasn't much of a bunch—about twenty head—but I'm going to make a starter right here, and now. I'm going to get that bunch back, and the man who stole them, if I have to go to hell to do it. And I'm going to do the same with every case of rustling that comes up from now on. I don't care if it's only one cow, I'm going to get it back—every trip. Now, I want to know if you'll lead a posse down into the south country and bring out that last bunch, and the man who rustled them?"

"I don't know—" hesitated the stranger.

"I offer you five thousand dollars in gold if you'll bring back those cows and the man who stole 'em," repeated Buck Johnson. "And I'll give you all the horses and men you think you need."

"I'll do it," replied the two-gun man promptly.

"Good!" cried Buck Johnson, "and you better start tomorrow."

"I shall start tonight—right now."

"Better yet. How many men do you want, and grub for how long?"

"I'll play her a lone hand."

"Alone!" exclaimed Johnson, his confidence visibly cooling.

"Alone! Do you think you can make her?"

"I'll be back with those cattle in not more than ten days."

"And the man," supplemented the Señor.

"And the man. What's more, I want that money here when I come in. I don't aim to stay in this country overnight."

A grin overspread Buck Johnson's countenance. He understood.

"Climate not healthy for you?" he hazarded. "I guess you'd be safe enough all right with us. But suit yourself. The money will be here."

"That's agreed?" insisted the two-gun man.

"Sure."

"I want a fresh horse—I'll leave mine—he's a good one. I want a little grub."

"All right. Parker'll fit you out."

The stranger rose.

"I'll see you in about ten days."

"Good luck," Señor Buck Johnson wished him.

The next morning Buck Johnson took a trip down into the "pasture" of five hundred wire-fenced acres.

"He means business," he confided to Jed Parker, on his return. "That caballo of his is a heap sight better than the Shorty horse we let him take. Jed, you found your man with nerve, all right. How did you do it?"

The two settled down to wait, if not with confidence, at least with interest. Sometimes, remembering the desperate character of the outlaws, their fierce distrust of any intruder, the wildness of the country, Buck Johnson and his foreman inclined to the belief that the stranger had undertaken a task beyond the powers of any one man. Again, remembering the stranger's cool grey eye, the poise of his demeanor, the quickness of his movements, and the two guns with tied holsters to permit of easy withdrawal, they were almost persuaded that he might win.

"He's one of those long-chance fellows," surmised Jed. "He likes excitement. I see that by the way he takes up with my knife play. He'd rather leave his hide on the fence than stay in the corral."

"Well, he's all right," replied Señor Buck Johnson, "and if he ever gets back, which same I'm some doubtful of, his dinero'll be here for him."

In pursuance of this he rode in to Willets, where shortly the overland train brought him from Tucson the five thousand dollars in double eagles.

In the meantime the regular life of the ranch went on. Each morning Sang, the Chinese cook, rang the great bell, summoning the men. They ate, and then caught up the saddle horses for the day, turning those not wanted from the corral into the pasture. Shortly they jingled away in different directions, two by two, on the slow Spanish trot of the cowpuncher. All day long thus they would ride, without food or water for man or beast, looking the range, identifying the stock, branding the young calves, examining generally into the state of affairs, gazing always with grave eyes on the magnificent, flaming, changing, beautiful, dreadful desert of the Arizona plains. At evening when the colored atmosphere, catching the last glow, threw across the Chiricahuas its

veil of mystery, they jingled in again, two by two, untired, unhasting, the glory of the desert in their deep-set, steady eyes.

And all the day long, while they were absent, the cattle, too, made their pilgrimage, straggling in singly, in pairs, in bunches, in long files, leisurely, ruminantly, without haste. There, at the long troughs filled by the windmill or the blindfolded pump mule, they drank, then filed away again into the mists of the desert. And Señor Buck Johnson, or his foreman, Parker, examined them for their condition, noting the increase, remarking the strays from another range. Later, perhaps, they, too, rode abroad. The same thing happened at nine other ranches from five to ten miles apart, where dwelt other fierce, silent men all under the authority of Buck Johnson.

And when night fell, and the topaz and violet and saffron and amethyst and mauve and lilac had faded suddenly from the Chiricahuas, like a veil that has been rent, and the ramparts had become slate-grey and then black—the soft-breathed night wandered here and there over the desert, and the land fell under an enchantment even stranger than the day's.

So the days went by, wonderful, fashioning the ways and the characters of men. Seven passed. Buck Johnson and his foreman began to look for the stranger. Eight, they began to speculate. Nine, they doubted. On the tenth, they gave him up—and he came.

They knew him first by the soft lowing of cattle. Jed Parker, dazzled by the lamp, peered out from the door, and made him out dimly turning the animals into the corral. A moment later his pony's hoofs impacted softly on the baked earth, he dropped from the saddle and entered the room.

"I'm late," said he briefly, glancing at the clock, which indicated ten, "but I'm here."

His manner was quick and sharp, almost breathless, as though he had been running.

"Your cattle are in the corral: all of them. Have you the money?"

"I have the money here," replied Buck Johnson, laying his hand against a drawer, "and it's ready for you when you've earned it. I don't care so much for the cattle. What I wanted is the man who stole them. Did you bring him?"

"Yes, I brought him," said the stranger. "Let's see that money."

Buck Johnson threw open the drawer, and drew from it the heavy canvas sack.

"It's here. Now bring in your prisoner."

The two-gun man seemed suddenly to loom large in the doorway. The muzzles of his revolvers covered the two before him. His speech came short and sharp.

"I told you I'd bring back the cows and the one who rustled them," he snapped. "I've never lied to a man yet. Your stock is in the corral. I'll trouble you for that five thousand. I'm the man who stole your cattle!"

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Moonlight Sonata

IF THIS REPORT were to be published in its own England, I would have to cross my fingers in a little foreword explaining that all the characters were fictitious—which stern requirement of the British libel law would embarrass me slightly because none of the characters is fictitious, and the story—told to Katharine Cornell by Clemence Dane and by Katharine Cornell told to me—chronicles what, to the best of my knowledge and belief, actually befell a young English physician whom I shall call Alvan Barach, because that does not happen to be his name. It is an account of a hitherto unreported adventure he had two years ago when he went down into Kent to visit an old friend—let us call *him* Ellery Cazalet—who spent most of his days on the links and most of his nights wondering how he would ever pay the death duties on the collapsing family manor-house to which he had indignantly fallen heir.

This house was a shabby little cousin to Compton Wynyates, with roof-tiles of Tudor red making it cozy in the noonday sun, and a hoarse bell which, from the clock tower, had been contemptuously scattering the hours like coins ever since Henry VIII was a rosy stripling. Within, Cazalet could afford only a doddering couple to fend for him, and the once sumptuous gardens did much as they pleased under the care of a single gardener. I think I must risk giving the gardener's real name, for none I could invent

would have so appropriate a flavor. It was John Scripture, and he was assisted, from time to time, by an aged and lunatic father who, in his lucid intervals, would be let out from his captivity under the eaves of the lodge to putter amid the lewd topiarian extravagance of the hedges.

The doctor was to come down when he could, with a promise of some good golf, long nights of exquisite silence, and a ghost or two thrown in if his fancy ran that way. It was characteristic of his rather ponderous humor that, in writing to fix a day, he addressed Cazalet at "The Creeps, Sevenoaks, Kent." When he arrived, it was to find his host away from home and not due back until all hours. Barach was to dine alone with a reproachful setter for a companion, and not wait up. His bedroom on the ground floor was beautifully paneled from footboard to ceiling, but some misguided housekeeper under the fourth George had fallen upon the lovely woodwork with a can of black varnish. The dowry brought by a Cazalet bride of the mauve decade had been invested in a few vintage bathrooms, and one of these had replaced a prayer closet that once opened into this bedroom. There was only a candle to read by, but the light of a full moon came waveringly through the wind-stirred vines that half curtained the mullioned windows.

In this museum, Barach dropped off to sleep. He did not know how long he had slept when he found himself awake again, and conscious that something was astir in the room. It took him a moment to place the movement, but at last, in a patch of moonlight, he made out a hunched figure that seemed to be sitting with bent, engrossed head in the chair by the door. It was the hand, or rather the whole arm, that was moving, tracing a recurrent if irregular course in the air. At first the gesture was teasingly half-familiar, and then Barach recognized it as the one a woman makes when embroidering. There would be a hesitation as if the needle were being thrust through some taut, resistant material, and then, each time, the long, swift, sure pull of the thread.

To the startled guest, this seemed the least menacing activity he had ever heard ascribed to a ghost, but just the same he had only one idea, and that was to get out of that room with all possible dis-

patch. His mind made a hasty reconnaissance. The door into the hall was out of the question, for madness lay that way. At least he would have to pass right by that weaving arm. Nor did he relish a blind plunge into the thorny shrubbery beneath his window, and a barefoot scamper across the frosty turf. Of course, there was the bathroom, but that was small comfort if he could not get out of it by another door. In a spasm of concentration, he remembered that he *had* seen another door. Just at the moment of this realization, he heard the comfortingly actual sound of a car coming up the drive, and guessed that it was his host returning. In one magnificent movement, he leaped to the floor, bounded into the bathroom, and bolted its door behind him. The floor of the room beyond was quilted with moonlight. Wading through that, he arrived breathless, but unmolested, in the corridor. Further along he could see the lamp left burning in the entrance hall and hear the clatter of his host closing the front door.

As Barach came hurrying out of the darkness to greet him, Cazalet boomed his delight at such affability, and famished by his long, cold ride, proposed an immediate raid on the larder. The doctor, already sheepish at his recent panic, said nothing about it, and was all for food at once. With lighted candles held high, the foraging party descended on the offices, and mine host was descanting on the merits of cold roast beef, Cheddar cheese, and milk as a light midnight snack, when he stumbled over a bundle on the floor. With a cheerful curse at the old goody of the kitchen who was always leaving something about, he bent to see what it was this time, and let out a whistle of surprise. Then, by two candles held low, he and the doctor saw something they will not forget while they live. It was the body of the cook. Just the body. The head was gone. On the floor alongside lay a bloody cleaver.

"Old Scripture, By God!" Cazalet cried out, and, in a flash, Barach guessed. Still clutching a candle in one hand, he dragged his companion back through the interminable house to the room from which he had fled, motioning him to be silent, tiptoeing the final steps. That precaution was wasted, for a regiment could

not have disturbed the rapt contentment of the ceremony still in progress within. The old lunatic had not left his seat by the door. Between his knees he still held the head of the woman he had killed. Scrupulously, happily, crooning at his work, he was plucking out the gray hairs one by one.

HANNIBAL COONS

Mister Million

FEDERAL PICTURES
Hollywood, California

January 10, 1950
Air Mail

FROM RICHARD L. REED
Director of Publicity

Mr. George Seibert
Special Representative, Federal Pictures
Hotel St. Charles
New Orleans, La.

Dear George:

George, I've got a little job for you. This one's hardly a job at all. It's really just a little thing to fill in till I can think of something for you to do.

A small item in this morning's paper has given me an idea so simple and foolproof that it startles even me. I know how Edison felt the morning the light globe worked.

But to business.

It seems that the good people of lovely Palm Isle, Florida, are shortly expecting their millionth postwar visitor, and are planning all sorts of nation-wide hoopla in his or her honor. Well, George,

[117]

for years I have been trying to think of a way to get in on one of these millionth visitor things. All that wonderful publicity just going to waste. Plus the humanitarian angle. The poor person they put the arm on is always some startled housewife from Lansing with two left eyes, or a fun-loving undertaker from Philadelphia. I have suffered through countless newsreels with these stammering unfortunates, feeling great pity not only for them but for the poor publicity men involved. And I have often thought what a dandy surprise it would be for all if one of these millionth visitors could just turn out to be maybe Betty Grable.

Well, not over an hour ago, as I was spooning my muskmelon and reading about the preliminary plans for the thing, I suddenly had it. Why not? Why not indeed?

If anybody would just take the trouble to run over and find out how the count was going, do a bit of simple arithmetic, and then just shoo Miss Grable down the gangplank at the proper moment—Eureka! If she really *were* the millionth visitor, what else could they do but publicize her with great vigor, and even gratitude?

At the moment I am thinking not of Miss Grable, however—since she no longer needs any of this sort of aid—but of one of our own employees, Miss Linda Riley, the noted Olympic swimmer whom we have been grooming to provide a little long-needed competition for Esther Williams. Miss Riley is from Florida; she spent many happy childhood vacations at Palm Isle. Also, she has just finished her first picture—she hasn't been dry for months—so what could be more natural than for us to give her a small paid vacation at lovely Palm Isle, scene of her youth. And if by sheer happenstance she should turn out to be their Millionth Visitor, wouldn't she look nice in the newsreels leading the parade in her bathing suit?

George, this one's a cinch. All you have to do is hop over to Palm Isle, skulk around back of the grandstand till you pick up the count, and then shoot me a wire as to when to put Linda on a plane. Since I don't want to spoil her air of pretty surprise, she will know nothing whatever about what is going on.

But we will, won't we? Hit it, boy. Let's help those folks with their festival.

As ever,
Dick

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

IDEA BRILLIANT IN EXTREME BUT SUCH CAREFUL TIMING NECESSARY
THINK BETTER HIRE LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEER. SUPPOSE I JUST FIND YOU
CASEY JONES'S PHONE NUMBER AND GET BACK TO MY WORK.

GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL ST. CHARLES NEW ORLEANS LA

GET BACK TO YOUR WHAT?

DICK.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

DICK, THESE SPLIT-SECOND DEALS NEVER WORK. SOMEBODY'S WATCH
IS ALWAYS SLOW.

GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL ST. CHARLES NEW ORLEANS LA

NO WATCH NECESSARY. JUST COUNT UP TO SIX. ONE TWO THREE
FOUR FIVE SIX. THEN DOWN THE GANGPLANK. GOT IT? IF YOU HAVE
TO COUNT ABOVE SIX, USE THE FINGERS ON YOUR OTHER HAND.

DICK.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

OKAY FUNNYMAN BUT DON'T SAY I DIDN'T WARN YOU. FEEL THIS
WILL BE WORST NAUTICAL DISASTER SINCE LUSITANIA.

GEORGE.

HOTEL FLAGLER
Palm Isle, Florida

January 13, 1950
Air Mail Special

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Well, I am here, and so far I must admit the thing looks like a breeze.

Getting the information we needed was surprisingly simple. It always astounds me what you can get in this world just by asking for it. No trouble and skulduggery. I merely called up a member of the committee, informed him that I was Mr. Jonathan Green from Mason City, Iowa, and that we were planning a similar celebration at our next year's Corn Festival. Just how did you go about choosing a millionth visitor?

Why it's simple, Mr. Green, he said—glad to have you with us. All you usually do, if no exact records have been kept, is just to estimate it. Some communities, just for luck, add seventeen and multiply by two. In any case, and a thing you may not have thought of, you have to set some definite time for the arrival of your millionth visitor, so that the reporters and newsreel men can be on hand. In our celebration here, for instance, we have decided that our Millionth Visitor will be the tenth person off the noon boat on the 16th.

Well, isn't that interesting, I said, and if you're ever up our way drop in and see us. The latchstring is always out at the Green home in Mason City.

Anyway, that's the deal. Get Linda on the 7:00 A.M. plane from Los Angeles on the morning of the 15th. That'll put her into Miami at 11:40 P.M., the night before the festivities, and leave enough leeway to take care of possible delays. I'll meet her at the airport, bed her down in Miami overnight, and have her positively tenth in line on the noon boat over to lovely Palm Isle.

I hate to admit it, but you have finally thought up one that can't miss.

Your reluctant admirer,
George.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

LINDA LEFT THIS MORNING. COULD THAT GUY YOU TALKED TO HAVE BEEN KIDDING? I DETECT YOU GETTING OVERCONFIDENT AGAIN, WHICH ALWAYS MAKES ME SHUDDER. WHEN YOU GET HAPPY I GET MISERABLE. IF YOU MESS THIS ONE UP I WILL HAVE YOU DRAWN AND DIMED. DRAWING AND QUARTERING WOULD BE TOO GOOD FOR YOU. DICK.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

AS USUAL YOU UNDERESTIMATE ME. OTHER MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE RECEIVED SUBSEQUENT CALLS FROM A MISTER HENRY HUMBER OF KLAMATH FALLS, CY BREEDLOVE FROM OKLAHOMA CITY, AND WALLY WASHBURN FROM WALLA WALLA. ALL TOLD ME EXACTLY SAME STORY. NO CHANCE OF UPSET. WILL WIRE THE MINUTE WE LAND. GEORGE.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

MAN THE LIFEBOATS. THERE HAS BEEN A NASTY ACCIDENT. DON'T OPEN TOMORROW'S PAPERS WITHOUT FIRST TAKING STRONG SEDATIVE. BELIEVE ME IT WAS NOT MY FAULT. AIR-MAIL LETTER FOLLOWS EXPLAINING ALL.

GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

YOU KNUCKLEHEAD. YOU HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY CLABBERED BEST IDEA I'VE HAD IN THIRTY YEARS. WHAT WENT WRONG THIS TIME? DICK.

HOTEL FLAGLER
Palm Isle, Florida

January 16, 1950
Air Mail Special

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Now, Dick, try to take this calmly.

All I can say is that at 11:59 we were three feet from fame, and at 11:59½ we were dead.

The only possible thing that could have gone wrong went. Linda got in on schedule, I got her to bed and up on schedule, I got her breakfasted and on the noon boat on schedule, and started her down the gangplank exactly tenth in line. At this point the odds were at least a million to one that there was no way in this world for Miss Linda Riley to avoid being Palm Isle's Millionth Visitor. There was no chance of anything going wrong except what did.

Just ahead of her going down the gangplank was a prim old boy in a Milan straw hat, a rolled umbrella, and a straw suitcase. As we neared the end of the gangplank he stumbled slightly, looked back, saw Linda, and before I could move a muscle he had stepped politely aside, ushered her off ahead of him, and stepped ashore himself into the arms of 10,000 flash bulbs. Buried under Linda's infernal luggage there was absolutely nothing I could do to prevent it. Linda is enjoying just what she expected—a quiet vacation, and Palm Isle is going nuts over their Millionth Visitor, who has turned out to be a Mr. A. C. Clendenning from New London, Connecticut.

But all is possibly not lost. As soon as I get this communiqué off, I will rush out of this hotel and somehow work Linda back into this festival. They certainly need something to balance Joy Boy.

And maybe I've got it! One of the events later this afternoon is to be a beauty contest to choose a Festival Queen to reign with

Mister Million during this time of frivolity. Perhaps I can purchase Linda a skimpy bathing suit, and induce her to enter.

More later. And keep cool.

George.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

DO NOT BOTHER TO BEAT A DEAD HORSE. JUST TAKE YOUR MEDICINE.
COMMIT SUICIDE. DICK.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

COME COME. PERK UP. WE'RE BACK IN BUSINESS. LINDA PALM ISLE FESTIVAL QUEEN AND SO LOVELY BESIDE OLD SPARERIBS THAT ALL PUBLICITY PLAY GOING TO HER. THIS AFTERNOON SHE WAS IN MORE NEWS-REELS THAN BOULDER DAM. ALSO TERRIFIC PLAY ALL PAPERS. MAYBE WHOLE THING LUCKY DEVELOPMENT. GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

LINDA INDEED IN ALL PAPERS AND NEWSREELS. IDENTIFIED AS MISS GENEVIEVE SMYTHE, PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR FROM VASSAR. HAVE YOU GONE COMPLETELY NUTS? DICK.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

OH YES, I MUST EXPLAIN THAT. I MEAN ABOUT THE SEEMING ERROR IN THE CAPTIONS. I MANAGED THAT ONLY BY QUICK THINKING. HOW DID I KNOW WHO THE OLD IDIOT WAS? AIR-MAIL LETTER FOLLOWS EXPLAINING ALL. AND DON'T WORRY. I'LL WORK IT OUT. GEORGE.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

ONE OF THESE DAYS YOU'RE GOING TO WORK IT OUT AT A DOLLAR A DAY IN THE HOLLYWOOD JAIL. I HAVE A FEELING THAT THIS IS THE TIME. DICK.

HOTEL FLAGLER
Palm Isle, Florida

January 18, 1950
Air Mail

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Well, here's what happened. I mean, why Linda had to temporarily become Miss Genevieve Smythe. After I tell you, you'll thank me.

When I decided to enter Linda in the beauty contest I knew that drastic measures would be necessary, as there are literally thousands of good-looking girls walking around this place in bathing suits that would be tight on a mosquito. So I went to the bathing-suit store and told the clerk that an eccentric niece of mine was going to the French Riviera, and did they have anything in beach togs that might gain her a little attention over there? Well, she said, we have the Bikini, or Atomic, model. I have seen the Atomic model, I said, and I am sure that she would not wish any such old-fashioned Mother Hubbard; do you have anything newer, possibly one having something to do with germ warfare?

I finally chose a small white number that would have been inadequate on a girl of five. You could have pasted the entire suit on a letter and mailed it, and they would have delivered it without question, thinking it was a stamp. But Linda looked just lovely in it, being a great girl for fresh air.

During the contest I stood off to one side of the runway where I could get a good view of Hilarious Harry, sitting uncomfortable and flustered among the judges. When he saw Linda he stiffened like a man who had grasped a live wire. One of the committee members was standing beside me and with a merry smile I asked him if he knew anything about who their Mister Million was.

Why yes, he said—ha, ha, ha,—that's the funniest part of the whole thing. That's old Arthur Clendenning, the crusty old bachelor who's head of the Eastern Motion Picture Review Board. He's

back of all that movie censorship back East. And now—ha, ha, ha—look at him!

I grasped the runway for support. Clendenning's the guy up there who's driven us nuts for twenty years. He thinks the last decent bathing suit was the one worn by Annette Kellerman.

And there was Linda strolling by on the runway smiling at him from head to toe. The thought of her winning the contest, and being presented to Clendenning in that white raveling as a representative of Federal Pictures, was a shattering prospect. We would never again have got another Federal Picture into the Eastern seaboard with a crowbar.

Fortunately up to that time the contestants had been identified only by numbers. Ripping out an old grocery list, I scribbled a frantic note and slipped it to Linda as she came down the runway steps. "If anybody asks you who you are, you are Miss Genevieve Smythe, young psychology major from Vassar. I'll explain later."

And that is why Miss Genevieve Smythe is suddenly famous all over the land.

But don't worry. I'll work it out.

As ever,
George.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

GEORGE I BEG OF YOU DO NO MORE. THE MINUTE CLENDENNING GETS BACK HOME HE REVIEWS OUR WHOLE NEXT YEAR'S PRODUCT. FOR GOD'S SAKE DON'T TRY ANY FUNNY STUFF. JUST LEAVE. TAKE LINDA AND GO ANYWHERE AT OUR EXPENSE. BELIEVE THERE'S A PLANE LEAVING THERE LATER TONIGHT FOR OUTER MONGOLIA. TAKE IT. DICK.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

COULDN'T POSSIBLY LEAVE NOW. HAVE BEEN MADE MEMBER OF ENTERTAINMENT COMMITTEE. WHOLE SITUATION CHANGED. DON'T MOVE A MUSCLE TILL YOU GET AIR-MAIL SPECIAL LETTER NOW ON WAY.

GEORGE.

HOTEL FLAGLER
Palm Isle, Florida

January 19, 1950

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Dick:

Well, as usual, our seeming catastrophe is turning out to be just about as lucky a thing as ever happened to us.

You know, Richard, the more you study the lives of great men the more you learn two things. First, they're lucky. An ordinary man goes out to plant a geranium—he digs a hole, plants the geranium, shovels the dirt back in, and that's that. He's got himself a geranium. A great man goes out to plant a geranium—he digs a hole, and strikes oil.

Also, great men don't seek jobs; jobs seek them. They go in and sit down to listen to the ball game, and all of a sudden there are all sorts of people stamping around the front porch demanding that they run for governor.

That's the way it's always been with me. I came over here to get Linda a little publicity, and a problem that's plagued the whole movie industry for twenty years is dumped in my lap. I never have any trouble with the job I'm supposed to do; it's these infernal executive duties that crowd in. Getting Linda publicity right this minute is no problem. All I'd have to do is unmask her, hit the drum once, and we would have publicity by the barrel. But if I did that, the only way we would ever get another picture into certain Eastern states would be to paint a mustache on it. Every time I turn around here, old Clendenning unthreads my needle.

So I guess the only thing to do is first take care of Clendenning. Nobody else has been able to convince him that he's an old idiot, so I guess I'll have to.

Giving Mr. Clendenning his hypodermic will of course not be easy. I have seldom seen a man with less talent for relaxation. When he isn't presiding like a starched ramrod at the various festival functions with Linda, he sits on the hotel porch all day formally

attired in fresh seersucker, collar, tie and hat—one of what the younger group here refers to as the waxworks set.

They all get up at dawn every day, eat a breakfast that would kill a harvest hand, and then sit on the hotel porch. None of them goes near the water, evidently thinking it poisonous. Just what fun they get out of this sort of thing I can't imagine, but it seems they have all been doing it every winter for forty years, so there must be something to it.

At any rate, my problem is to get Mr. Clendenning down off that porch and into a decent frame of mind. Somehow he must be shown that movie people are dandy folks, and modern bathing suits like Linda's healthful and wholesome.

My plan is simple in the extreme. I have found that saving a man's life tends to give him a certain sense of gratitude, and in reading many accounts of rescues at sea, I have yet to read of a drowning man criticizing the costume of the lifeguard.

I will therefore hire myself a small, inexpensive skiff, saw an adequate hole nearly through the bottom, and then invite Mr. Clendenning to come along with Linda and me for a nice boat ride. I will tell Linda to wear her bathing suit under her slacks, as we may have a chance for a dip. I will tell Mr. Clendenning nothing.

When we are several miles offshore I will casually kick out the plug, and let nature take its course. Paddling desperately around, I will shout to Linda that I think I can keep up all right, and to save Mr. Clendenning. She will then naturally throw off her outer raiment and tow Mr. Clendenning briskly to shore. There is hardly any chance at all that we will drown him; the only hazard is that Linda will tow him up onto the sand at such a rate of speed that he will scratch his elbows.

At any rate, once ashore all Mr. Clendenning can possibly say is, My goodness, these new bathing suits do give a rescuer wonderful freedom of the arms, don't they? Another ounce of wool on that dear girl and I would have drowned like a gopher. Oh, what a fool I have been!

By this time I will have paddled brokenly to shore, and I will step up and divulge Linda's real identity, with the camera shutters snapping like popcorn.

We will then shake hands all around, Mr. Clendenning will go back East and okay all our pictures, and we will all live happily ever after.

What's the matter with that plan? No other publicity man in Hollywood would even have thought of it.

As ever,
George.

GEORGE SEIBERT

HOTEL FLAGLER PALM ISLE FLA

IF YOU SO MUCH AS SAY HELLO TO CLENDENNING I'LL HAVE YOU DRAGGED THROUGH THE STREETS OF THAT PLACE BEHIND A USED ESSEX. DISTRIBUTION END OF THIS FIRM NEEDS NO HELP FROM YOU. CANCEL THE WHOLE RIDICULOUS PLAN AT ONCE AND LEAVE CLENDENNING STRICTLY ALONE AND GET LINDA OUT OF THERE. IMMEDIATELY.

RICHARD L. REED.

RICHARD L. REED

FEDERAL PICTURES HOLLYWOOD CALIF

TOO LATE TO FLEE. LOCAL NEWSPAPERMAN HAS RECOGNIZED LINDA AND IS THREATENING TO BLOW WHISTLE ON US. MAINTAINS WE HAVE DEEPLY WRONGED LOCAL BEAUTIES. IMPERATIVE CARRY OUT BOATING EXCURSION IMMEDIATELY. WE EMBARK AT TEN THIS MORNING. WILL WIRE YOU BY NOON WITH GLAD TIDINGS OR MY OBITUARY. GEORGE.

CHIEF OF POLICE

PALM ISLE FLA

ONE OF OUR MOST VALUED EMPLOYEES, A MR. GEORGE SEIBERT, REGISTERED FLAGLER HOTEL YOUR CITY, HAS SUFFERED COMPLETE MENTAL COLLAPSE. SEIZE AND HOLD HIM FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS. AND WATCH OUT. HE'S TRICKY.

RICHARD L. REED

DIRECTOR OF PUBLICITY

FEDERAL PICTURES, INC.

CITY JAIL
Palm Isle, Florida

January 21, 1950

Mr. Richard L. Reed
Director of Publicity, Federal Pictures
Hollywood, California

Dear Mr. Reed, Sir:

Well, of all the ungrateful things! How about getting me out of here?

Actually, it isn't too uncomfortable. I have been giving the boys a little help with the publicity plans for their annual Policeman's Ball, and they have just moved me to the bridal suite with the ocean view. But for some reason they refuse to let me out till they hear from you. So let them hear, Richard, let them hear.

But perhaps you would first like a few details about this morning's busy goings on. By now you have no doubt seen the papers, but there often are a few things the reporters don't get quite right. Thank the Lord.

In the first place, it was not my fault that things didn't work out quite as I'd originally planned. Everything went strictly according to the original script at first. I got the boat, sawed the hole, got Linda, got Clendenning—she introduced me as her Uncle George from Kalamazoo—and we took off.

As we cleared the breakwater I first thought that maybe I'd overdone it slightly. The broken concrete I had piled in the bait tank was making us ride a little low in the water. However, I didn't let it bother me. There was seepage through the crack I'd sawed, but I thought we'd stay afloat long enough for the plan to work.

As the first ocean rollers hit us, Mr. Clendenning, sitting in the bow clutching his straw hat, said, "Do you think this is safe?"

"You are just as safe," I replied, "as you would be in your mother's arms." I saw no reason to add that my own dear mother once stepped on a roller skate with me in her arms, practically knocking my brains out on the corner of the kitchen stove.

Sure enough, we were hardly a mile offshore when tragedy

struck. I turned to smile back at Linda, and discovered that she was rapidly turning as green as her beautiful taut slacks. "I think maybe I'm getting sick," she said.

"Good Lord!" I cried, and jumping up to aid her I stepped on the place I'd sawed in the boat and stuck my leg into the Atlantic Ocean up to the hip. In so doing I somehow managed to hit my head on the side of the boat, and passed out colder than a trout.

When I opened my eyes, revived by the water, Mr. Clendenning was swimming about as briskly as a goldfish, holding Linda up with one hand and slapping me in the face with the other. The man swims like a barracuda. I noticed that he had even removed his tie and shoes. "Pardon me," he said, "but's it's an emergency."

"It's quite all right," I said. "I think I can get in all right now," shucking off my own clothes down to my swimming trunks, "and if you'll strip some of that chartreuse foliage off Linda, you can probably tow her in all right."

"Linda?" he said.

"I'll tell you later," I said.

"Do you think we should?" he said.

"Sure," I said, "it's an emergency. And besides, she probably has her bathing suit on under it."

"All right," he said. And treading water, he peeled off Linda's water-soaked clothing like a man repairing an atomic bomb. Under her slacks and sweater she did have on her bathing suit, such as it was. During the disrobing she didn't let out a peep, incidentally, being at the moment a very ill girl.

"Now," I said to Clendenning, "put your left arm around her, and let's see if we can make it in."

He did, and we did.

When we finally got to the beach, I was too weary to be of any help whatever, and Mr. Clendenning, his eyes round as buggy wheels, gathered Linda up in his arms and carried her up through the bathers onto the dry sand. Then we all sank down exhausted, and suddenly there were about five million people milling around us, the lifeguards wrapping us in blankets, photographers taking pictures, doctors arriving, the jealous newspaper guy jumping up and down denouncing Linda as a ringer. Then Mr. Clendenning,

who is really a pretty fine old boy, took a deep breath and faced the newspaper guy.

"Whatever this young woman has done," he said, "she has just very nearly drowned, and for the moment I would suggest that you keep a civil tongue in your head."

At that I revived rapidly, and told Mr. Clendenning and the reporters that all Linda had been trying to do was have a small incognito vacation; I had been sent along to see that she wasn't bothered by autograph seekers, and we had certainly meant no harm to anyone.

"Exactly!" said Mr. Clendenning. "No one knows better than I how difficult it is for a person of prominence in this world to enjoy any privacy, even on a vacation. May I assist you to your hotel, Miss Riley?"

You have never seen such a changed man. Impaling the assembly with a glittery eye, he calmly took Linda's arm and escorted her with great dignity across the strand to the hotel. No man can save the life of a girl like Linda, and hold her, however ill, in his arms, and ever be quite the same man again. Particularly if he is not used to that sort of thing.

You see, Dick, that's where the luck I was talking about comes in. Last night before all this happened, as I was sawing the hole in the boat, I chanced to see Mr. Clendenning, in a bathing suit straight out of a Mack Sennett comedy, creep down to the shore, plunge in, and take off like a man equipped with an outboard motor. Amazed, I finished my work, and then hastened up and had a short talk with one of the more ancient desk clerks. "Why, yes," he said, "Mr. Clendenning is an excellent swimmer. But, like many of our older guests, he prefers a somewhat outmoded suit, and therefore swims at night, thus avoiding much adolescent ridicule."

Well! And that's when I switched the plot. Because if there's one thing that gives a man a greater sense of gratitude than saving his own life, it's giving him the privilege of saving your life, particularly if you are a girl like Linda. And that is why I slipped Linda the small mickey in her breakfast orange juice.

And for all this my reward is to get clapped in the sneezer. Truly it does not pay in this world to have unusual ability.

What did I do when your gendarmes seized me? What could I do? I called my attorney, Clendenning. He is even now preparing a suit that will curl your hair—I believe he mentioned false imprisonment, defamation of character, and barratry.

Actually, of course, I haven't called him at all, but I might if you don't get a key and a bonus over here with great speed. These concrete floors could give a man arthritis.

As ever,
George.

ELLERY QUEEN

The Adventure of the Invisible Lover

ROGER BOWEN WAS THIRTY, blue-eyed, and white. He was taller than most, laughed a little more readily, spoke English with an apologetic Harvard accent, drank an occasional cocktail, smoked more cigarettes than were good for him, was very thoughtful of his only living relative—an elderly aunt living, chiefly upon his bounty, in San Francisco—and balanced his reading between Sabatini and Shaw. And he practised what law there was to practice in the town of Corsica, N. Y. (population 745), where he had been born, stolen apples from old man Carter's orchard, swum raw in Major's Creek, and sparked with Iris Scott on Saturday nights on the veranda of the Corsica Pavilion (two bands, continuous dancing).

To listen to his acquaintances, who comprised one hundred per cent of the population of Corsica, he was a "prince," a "real good boy," "no darned highbrow," and a "reg'lar guy." To listen to his friends—who for the most part shared the same residence, Michael Scott's boarding house on Jasmine Street off Main—there was no jollier, kindlier, gentler, more inoffensive young man in the length and breadth of the land.

Within a half-hour of his arrival in Corsica from New York, Mr. Ellery Queen was able to gauge the temper of the Corcisan populace concerning its most talked-of citizen. He learned something from a Mr. Klaus, the grocer on Main Street, a juicy morsel

from a nameless urchin playing marbles in the road near the County Courthouse, and a good deal from one Mrs. Parkins, wife of the Corsican postmaster. He learned least of all from Mr. Roger Bowen himself, who seemed a decent enough sort, and quite plainly hurt and bewildered.

And as he left the county jail and headed for the boarding house and Roger Bowen's inner circle of friends, who were responsible for his hurried journey from Manhattan, it struck Mr. Ellery Queen that it was uncommonly curious such a paragon of all the virtues should be lying disconsolately on a cot in a dingy iron-barred cell awaiting trial on a charge of murder in the first degree.

"Now, now," said Mr. Ellery Queen after a space, rocking gently back and forth on the rose-curtained porch, "surely it can't be as black as all that? From all I've heard about young Bowen—"

Father Anthony clasped his bony hands tightly. "I baptized Roger myself," he said in a trembling voice. "It isn't possible, Mr. Queen. I baptized him! And he has told me he did not shoot McGovern. I believe him; he wouldn't lie to me. And yet . . . John Graham, the biggest lawyer in the county, who is defending Roger, Mr. Queen, says it's one of the worst circumstantial cases he has ever seen."

"For that matter," growled towering Michael Scott, snapping his suspenders over his burly breast, "the boy says so himself. Hell, I wouldn't believe it even if Roger confessed! Beggin' your pardon, Father."

"All I say," snapped Mrs. Gandy from her wheel-chair, "any one says Roger Bowen shot that sneaky, black-haired devil from New York is a fool. Suppose Roger was in his room, alone, the night it happened? A person has the right to go to sleep, hasn't he? And how on earth would there be a witness to *that*, hey, Mr. Queen? The poor child's no flibbertigibbet, like some I know!"

"No alibi," sighed Ellery.

"Makes it bad," grumbled Pringle, chief of police of Corsica, a very fat and brawny old man. "Makes it downright bad. Better if he'd *had* some one with him that night. Not," he added

hastily at Mrs. Grandy's outraged glare, "that Roger would, ye understand. But when I heard about that there, now, fight, he'd had with McGovern—"

"Oh," said Ellery softly. "They came to blows? There were threats?"

"Not exactly blows, Mr. Queen," said Father Anthony, wincing. "But they did quarrel. It was the same evening: McGovern was shot about midnight, and Roger had words with him only an hour or so before. As a matter of fact, sir, it wasn't the first time. They had quarreled violently on several previous occasions. Enough to establish motive to the District Attorney's satisfaction."

"But the slug," growled Michael Scott. "The slug!"

"Yes," said Dr. Dodd, a short mousy intelligent-looking man; he spoke unhappily. "I'm county coroner as well as local undertaker, you see, Mr. Queen, and it was my duty to examine that bullet when I dug it out of McGovern's body on autopsy. When Pringle held Roger on suspicion and got hold of the boy's gun, we naturally compared the bore-marks. . . ."

"Bore-marks?" drawled Ellery. "Really!" He inspected Chief Pringle and Coroner Dodd with rather grudging admiration.

"Oh, we didn't trust our own judgment in the matter," said the coroner hastily, "although under my microscope it did look. . . . It was all very nasty, Mr. Queen, but duty's duty, and an officer of the law has his oath to uphold. We sent it to New York, with the gun, for examination by a ballistics expert. His report came back confirming our findings. What were we to do? Pringle arrested Roger."

"Sometimes," said Father Anthony quietly, "there is a higher duty, Samuel."

The coroner looked miserable. Ellery said: "Does Bowen have a license to carry firearms?"

"Yep," muttered the fat policeman. "Lots of folks up this way do. Good huntin' in the hills yonder. It's a .38 did the job, all right—Roger's .38. Colt automatic, and a dandy, too."

"Is he a good shot?"

"I'll say he is!" exclaimed Scott. "That boy can shoot." His

hard face lengthened. "I ought to know. I've got six pieces of shrapnel in my left leg right now where a Heinie shell came after me in Belleau."

"Excellent shot," faltered the coroner. "We've often gone rabbit-hunting together, and I've seen him pot a running target at fifty yards with his Colt. He won't use a rifle; too tame for real sport, he says."

"But what does Mr. Bowen say to all this?" demanded Ellery, squinting at the smoke of his cigarette. "He wouldn't talk to me at all."

"Roger," murmured Father Anthony, "says no. He did not kill McGovern, he says. That's enough for me."

"But scarcely for the District Attorney, eh?" Ellery sighed again. "Then, since his automatic was used, it logically follows that—granted he's telling the truth—some one stole it from him and replaced it secretly after the murder?"

The men looked at one another uncomfortably, and Father Anthony smiled a faint proud smile. Then Scott growled: "Damnedest thing. Graham—that's our lawyer—Graham he says to Roger: 'Listen, young man. It's absolutely necessary for you to testify that the gun could have been stolen from you. Your life may depend on it,' and all that. And what do you think that young fool says? 'No,' he says, 'that's not the truth, Mr. Graham. Nobody did steal my gun. I'm a light sleeper,' he says, 'and the bureau with the gun in it is right next my bed. And I'd bolted my door that night. Nobody could have got in and taken it. So,' he says, 'I'm not going to testify to any such thing!'"

Ellery expelled smoke in a whistle. "Our hero, eh? That's—" He shrugged. "Now, this—ah—series of quarrels. If I understand correctly, it concerned—"

"Iris Scott," said a cool voice from the screen-door. "No don't get up, Mr. Queen! Oh, it's quite all right, father. I'm of age, and there's no point in keeping from Mr. Queen what the whole town knows anyway." Her voice stopped and caught on something. "What do you want to know, Mr. Queen?"

Mr. Queen, it was to be feared, was temporarily incapable of

coherent speech. He was on his feet, gaping like a lout in a museum. If he had found a perfect diamond winking in the dust of Corsica's Main Street he could not have been more flabbergasted. Beauty anywhere is a rarity; in Corsica it was a miracle. So this is Iris Scott, he thought. Well named, O'Michael! She was fresh and soft and handsomely made, and dewey and delicate as the flower itself. Strange soil to spring from! Her queerly wide black eyes held him fascinated, and he lost himself in her loveliness. In the gloom of the doorway she stood alone, a thing of beauty. It was joy just to look at her. If there was seductiveness in her, it was the unconscious lure of perfection—the swoop of an eyebrow, the curve of lips, the poise of a sculptured breast.

And so Mr. Ellery Queen understood why it was possible for such a paragon as Roger Bowen to be facing the electric chair. Even if he himself had been blind to her beauty, the men on the porch would have made him see. Dodd was regarding her quietly, with remote and humble worship. Pringle stared at her with vast thirst—yes, even Pringle, that enormous fat old man. And Father Anthony's aged eyes were proud, and a little sad. But in Michael Scott's eyes there was only the fierce jubilation of possession. This was Circe and Vesta in one, and she might move a man to murder as easily as a poet to lyric ecstasy.

"Well!" he said at last, drawing a deep breath. "Pleasant surprise. Sit down, Miss Scott, while I collect my wits. McGovern was an admirer of yours?"

Her heels made little clackings on the porch. "Yes," she said in a subdued voice, staring at the ivory hands in her lap. "You might call it that. And I—I liked him. He was different. An artist from New York. He'd come up to Corsica about six months ago to paint our famous hills. He knew so much, he'd travelled in France and Germany and England, so many celebrities were his friends. . . . We're almost peasants here, Mr. Queen. I never m-met any one like him."

"Sneaky devil," hissed Mrs. Gandy, her thin features contorted.

"Forgive me," smiled Ellery. "Did you love him?"

A bee buzzed about Pringle's hairy ears, and he angrily

slapped at it. She said: "I—It's—Now that he's dead, no. Death—somehow—makes a difference. Perhaps I—saw him in his true colors."

"But you spent a lot of time with him—alive?"

"Yes, Mr. Queen."

There was a small silence, and then Michael Scott said heavily: "I don't interfere in my daughter's affairs; see? She's got her own life to live. But I never cottoned to McGovern myself. He was a fourflusher with a smooth line and plenty tough. I wouldn't trust him from here to there. I told Iris, but she wouldn't listen. Like a girl, she sort of went off her nut. He hung around longer than he'd expected—owed me," grimly, "five weeks' rent. Why the hell wouldn't he hang around? Why wouldn't anything in pants?"

"There," drawled Ellery, "is the perfect rhetorical question. And Roger Bowen, Miss Scott?"

"We've—we've grown up together," said Iris in the same low voice. And she tossed her head suddenly. "It's always been so *settled*. I suppose I've resented that. And then his interference. He was simply furious about Mr. McGovern. Once, several weeks ago, Roger threatened to kill him. We all heard him; they—they were arguing in the parlor there and we were sitting on the porch here. . . ."

There was another silence, and then Ellery said gently "And do you think young Roger shot this city-slicker, Miss Scott?"

She raised her devastating eyes to his. "No! I'll never believe that. Not Roger. He was angry, that's all. He didn't mean what he said." And then she choked and to their horror began to sob. Michael Scott grew brick-red, and Father Anthony looked distressed. The others winced. "I—I'm sorry," she said.

"And who do you think did?" asked Ellery softly.

"Mr. Queen, I don't know."

"Any one?" They shook their heads. "Well, I believe, Pringle, you mentioned something about McGovern's room having been left precisely as you found it the night of the murder. . . . By the way, what happened to his body?"

"Well," said the coroner, "we held it after the autopsy for inquest, of course, and tried to find some relative to claim the body.

But McGovern apparently was alone in the world, and not even a friend stepped forward. He left nothing except a few possessions in his New York studio. I fixed him up myself, and we buried him in the New Corsican Cemetery with the proceeds."

"Here's the key," wheezed the policeman, struggling to his feet. "I got to go on down to Lower Village. Dodd'll tell you everything you want to know. I hope—" He stopped helplessly, and then waddled off the porch. "Comin', padre?" he muttered without turning.

"Yes," said Father Anthony. "Mr. Queen . . . Anything at all, you understand—" His thin shoulders drooped as he slowly followed Pringle down the cement walk.

"If you'll excuse us, Mrs. Gandy?" murmured Ellery.

"Who found the body?" he demanded as they trudged upstairs in the cool semi-darkness of the house.

"I did," sighed the coroner. "I've been boarding with Michael for twelve years. Ever since Mrs. Scott died. Just a couple of old bachelors, eh, Michael?" They both sighed. "It was on that terribly stormy night three weeks ago—thundered and rained, remember? I'd been reading in my room—it was about midnight—and I started for the bathroom down the hall upstairs before going to bed. I passed McGovern's room; the door was open and the light was on. He was sitting in the chair, facing the door." The coroner shrugged. "I saw at once he was dead. Shot through the heart. The blood on his pajamas . . . I roused Michael at once. Iris heard us and came, too." They paused at the head of the stairs. Ellery heard the girl catch her breath and Scott was panting.

"Had he been dead long?" he asked, making for a closed door indicated by the coroner's forefinger.

"Just a few minutes; his body was still warm. He died instantly."

"I presume the storm prevented any one from hearing the shot—there was only one wound, I suppose?" Dr. Dodd nodded. "Well, here we are." Ellery fitted the key Pringle had given him into the lock, and twisted it. Then he pushed open the door. No one said anything.

The room was flooded with sunlight; it looked as innocent of

violence as a newborn baby. It was a very large room, shaped exactly like Ellery's own. And it was furnished exactly like Ellery's. The bed was identical, and it stood in a similar position between two windows; the table and rush-bottomed, cane-backed chair in the middle of the room might have come from Ellery's room; the rug, the bureau, the highboy . . . Hmm! There *was* a difference.

He murmured: "Are all your rooms furnished exactly alike?"

Scott raised his tufted brows. "Sure. When I went into this business and changed the shack into a rooming house, I bought up a lot of stuff from a bankrupt place in Albany. All the same stuff. All these rooms up here are the same. Why?"

"No special reason. It's interesting, that's all." Ellery leaned against the jamb and took out a cigarette, searching the scene meanwhile with his restless gray eyes. There was no faintest sign of a struggle. Directly before the doorway were the table and cane-backed chair, and the chair faced the door. In a straight line with the door and chair on the far side of the room stood an old-fashioned highboy against the wall. His eyes narrowed again. Without turning, he said: "That highboy. In my room it's between the two windows."

He heard the girl's soft breathing behind him. "Why . . . father! The highboy wasn't there when—when Mr. McGovern was alive!"

"That's funny," muttered Scott in astonishment.

"But on the night of the murder was the highboy where it is now?"

"Why—yes, it was," said Iris in a puzzled way.

"Certainly. I remember now," said the coroner, frowning.

"Good," drawled Ellery, pushing away from the door. "Something to work on." He strode over to the highboy, stooped and tugged at it until he had pulled it back from the wall. He knelt behind it and went over the wall, inch by inch, intently. And then he stopped. He had found a peculiar dent in the plaster about a foot from the wainscoting. It was no more than a quarter of an inch in diameter, was roughly circular, and was impressed perhaps a sixteenth of an inch into the wall. A fragment of plaster had fallen away; he found it on the floor.

When he rose he wore an air of disappointment. He returned to the doorway. "Nothing much. You're sure nothing's been disturbed since the night of the murder?"

"I'll vouch for that," said Scott.

"Hmm. By the way, I see some of McGovern's personal belongings are still here. Did Pringle search this room thoroughly on the night of the murder, Dr. Dodd?"

"Oh, yes."

"But he didn't find anything," growled Scott.

"You're positive? Nothing at all?"

"Why, we were all here when he was looking, Mr. Queen!"

Ellery smiled, examining the room with a peculiar zest. "No offense, Mr. Scott. Well! I think I'll go to my own room and mull over this baffling business for a bit. I'll keep this key, Doctor."

"Of course. Anything you want, you know—"

"Not now, at any rate. Where will you be if something comes up?"

"At my undertaking parlors on Main Street."

"Good." And rather vaguely and wearily Ellery smiled again and turned the key in the lock and trudged down the hall.

He found his room cool and soothing, and he lay back on the bed with his hands crossed beneath his aching head, thinking. The house was quiet enough. Outside one of his windows a robin chirped and a bee zoomed; that was all. Past the fluttering curtains came the sweet-scented wind from the hills.

Once he heard Iris's light step in the hall outside; and again the rumble of Michael Scott's voice downstairs.

He lay smoking for perhaps twenty minutes; and then all at once he sprang from the bed and darted to the door. Opening it to a crack, he listened. . . . All clear. So he quietly stepped out into the hall and tip-toed to the locked door of the dead man's room, and unlocked it, and went in, and turned the key again behind him.

"If there's any sense in this misbegotten world—" he muttered, stopped, and hurried to the cane-chair in which McGovern had

been sitting when he died. He knelt and closely examined the solid crisscrossing mesh of cane making up the back of the chair. But there was nothing wrong with it.

Frowning, he got to his feet and began to prowl. He prowled the length and breadth of the room, stooped over like an old hunchback, his underlip thrust forward and his eyes straining. He even sprawled full length on the floor to grope beneath pieces of furniture; and he made a tour under the bed like a sapper in No Man's Land. But when his inspection of the floor was completed, he was empty-handed. He brushed the dust from his clothes with a grimace.

It was as he was replacing the contents of the wastebasket, disconsolately, that his face lit up. "Lord! If it's possible that—" He left the room, locking the door again, and made a quick and cautious reconnaissance up and down the hall, listening. Apparently he was alone. So, noiselessly and quite without feeling of guilt, he began room by room to search the sleeping quarters.

It was in the cane-chair of the fourth room he investigated that he found what his deductions had led him to believe he might find. And the room belonged to the person to whom he had even beforehand vaguely glimpsed it as belonging.

Very careful to leave the room precisely as he had found it, Mr. Ellery Queen returned to his own quarters, bathed his face and hands, adjusted his necktie, brushed his clothes again, and with a dreamy smile went downstairs.

Finding Mrs. Gandy and Michael Scott occupied on the porch playing a desultory game of two-handed whist, Ellery chuckled silently and made his way to the rear of the lower floor. He discovered Iris in a vast cavern of a kitchen, busy stirring something pungently savory over a huge stove. The heat had carmined her cheeks, she wore a crisp white apron, and altogether she looked delectable.

"Well, Mr. Queen?" she asked anxiously, dropping her ladle and facing him with grave, begging eyes.

"Do you love him as much as that?" sighed Ellery, drinking in her loveliness. "Lucky Roger! Iris, my child—you see, I'm being

very fatherly, although I assure you my soul is in the proverbial torment—we progress. Yes, indeed. I think I may tell you that young Lothario faces a rosier prospect than he faced this morning. Yes, yes, we have made strides.”

“You mean you—he— Oh, Mr. Queen!”

Ellery sat down in a gleaming kitchen chair, filched a sugared cookie from a platter on the porcelain table, munched it, swallowed, looked critical, smiled, and took another. “Yours? Delicious. A veritable Lucrece, b’gad! Or is it Penelope I’m thinking of? Yes, I mean just that, honey. If this is a sample of your cooking—”

“Baking.” She rushed forward suddenly and to his stupefaction clutched at his hand and pulled it to her breast. “Oh, Mr. Queen, if you only could—would—I never knew I—I loved him so much until just—just now. . . . In jail!” She shuddered. “I’ll do anything—anything—”

Ellery blinked, loosened his collar, tried to look nonchalant, and then gently disengaged his hand. “Now, now, my dear, I know you would. But don’t ever do that to me again. It makes me feel like God. Whew!” He swabbed his brow. “Now, listen, beautiful. Listen hard. There *is* something you can do.”

“Anything!” Her face glowed into his.

He rose and began to stride around the spotless floor. “Am I right in supposing that your Samuel Dodd’s very faithful to his office?”

She stared. “Sam Dodd? What on earth—. He takes his job seriously, if that’s what you mean.”

“I thought so. It complicates matters.” He smiled grimly. “However, we must face reality, mustn’t we? My dear young goddess, than whom no lovelier creature ever graced the sour earth, you’re going to vamp your Dr. Sam Dodd to within an inch of his officious life tonight. Or didn’t you know that?”

Anger flashed from her black eyes. “Mr. Queen!”

“Tut-tut, although it’s most becoming. I’m not suggesting anything—er—drastic, my child. Another cookie is called for.” He helped himself to two. “Can you get him to take you to the movies

tonight? His being in the house here makes matters difficult, and I've got to have him out of the way or he's liable to call out the State Militia to stop me."

"I can make Sam Dodd do anything I want," said the goddess very coolly, the blush leaving her cheeks, "but I don't understand why."

"Because," mumbled Ellery over another cake, "I say so, dear heart. I'm going to trample over his authority tonight, you see. There's something I must get done, and without the proper hocus-pocus of papers and things it's distinctly illegal, if not criminal. Dodd could help, but if I'm any judge of character he won't; and so if he doesn't know anything about it neither he nor I will have anything on the well-known conscience."

She measured him impersonally, and he felt uncomfortable under those level eyes. "Will it help Roger?"

"And," said Ellery fervently, "how!"

"Then I'll do it." And she lowered her eyes suddenly and began to fuss with her apron. "And now if you'll please get out of my kitchen. Mr. Ellery Queen, I've some dinner to make. And I think"—she fled to the stove and took up the ladle—"you're very wonderful."

Mr. Ellery Queen gulped, flushed, and beat a hasty retreat.

When he pushed open the screen-door he found Mrs. Gandy gone, and Scott sitting silent with Father Anthony on the porch. "The very men," he said cheerily. "Where's the afflicted Mrs. Gandy? By the way, how does she negotiate those stairs in that wheel-chair?"

"Doesn't. She's got a room on the lower floor," said Scott. "Well, Mr. Queen?" His eyes were haggard.

Father Anthony was regarding him with steadfast gravity.

Ellery's face turned bleak of a sudden. He sat down and drew his rocker close to theirs. "Father," he said quietly, "something informs me that you serve—honestly serve—a higher law than man's."

The old priest studied him for a moment. "I know little of law, Mr. Queen. I serve two masters—Christ and the souls He died for."

Ellery considered this in silence. Then he said: "Mr. Scott, you mentioned before that you had gone through Belleau Wood. Death, then, holds no terrors for you."

The burly man's hard eyes bored into Ellery's. "Listen, Mr. Queen, I saw my best friend torn in half before me. I had to pick his guts off my hands. No, I'm not scared of all hell; I've been there."

"Very good," said Ellery softly. "Very good indeed. Aramis, Porthos, and—if I may presume—D'Artagnan. A little cockeyed, but it will serve. Father, Mr. Scott," and the priest and the burly father of Iris stared at his lips, "will you help me open a grave to-night?"

The eve of St. Walpurga was months dead, but the witches danced that night nevertheless. They danced in the shadows flung by the dark moon over the crazy hillside; they squealed and screeched in the wind over the mute, waiting graves.

Mr. Ellery Queen felt uncommonly glad that he was one of three that night. The cemetery lay on the outskirts of Corsica, ringed in iron and bordered with capering trees. An icy breeze blew death over their heads. The gravestones glimmered on the breast of the hillside like dead men's bones polished clean and white by the winds. An angry, furry black cloud hid half the moon, and the trees wept restlessly. No, it was not difficult to imagine that witches danced.

They walked in silence, instinctively keeping together. It was Father Anthony who braved the spirits, breasting the agitated air like a tall ship in the van, his vestments flapping and snapping. His face was dark and grave, but unruffled. Ellery and Michael Scott struggled behind under the weight of spades, picks, ropes, and a large bulky bundle. On all the moving, whispering, shadow-infested hillside they were the only living beings.

They found McGovern's grave in virgin soil, a little away from the main colony of headstones. It was a lonely spot high on the hill, a vulture's roost. Earth still raw made a mound above the dead man, and there was only a scrawny stick to mark the clay that lay there. Still in silence, and with drawn faces, the two men

set to work with their picks while Father Anthony kept the vigil above them. The moon swam in and out maddeningly.

When the hard earth had been loosened, they cast aside the picks and attacked the soil with their spades. Both wore old overalls over their clothes.

"Now I know," muttered Ellery, resting a moment by the mounting pile of earth beside the grave, "what it feels like to be a ghoul. Father, I'm thankful you're along. I'm cursed with too much imagination."

"There is nothing to be afraid of, my son," said the old priest in a little bitter murmur. "These are only dead men."

Ellery shivered. Scott growled: "Let's get goin'!"

And so at last their spades struck hollowly upon wood.

How they managed it Ellery never clearly remembered. It was titans' work, and long before it was finished he was drenched with perspiration which stung like icicles under the cold fingers of the wind. He felt disembodied, a phantom in a nightmare. Scott labored in isolated silence, performing prodigies, while Ellery panted beside him and Father Anthony looked somberly on. And then Ellery realized that he was hauling upon two ropes on one side of the pit, and that old Scott was pulling on their other ends opposite him. Something long and black-clotted and heavy came precariously up from the depths, swaying as if it had life. One last heave, and it thumped over the side, to Ellery's horror overturning. He sank to the ground, squatting on his hams and fumbling for a cigarette.

"I—need—a—breather," he muttered, and puffed desperately. Scott leaned calmly on his spade. Only Father Anthony went to the pine box, and tugged until it righted itself, and with slow tender hands began to pry off the lid.

Ellery watched the old man, fascinated; and then he sprang to his feet, hurled his cigarette away, cursed himself beneath his breath, and snatched the pick from the priest's hands. A single powerful wrench, the lid screeched up. . . .

Scott set his muscular mouth and stepped forward. He pulled canvas gloves on his hands. Then he bent over the dead man. Father Anthony stepped back, closing his tired eyes. And Ellery

feverishly unwrapped the bulky bundle he had carried all the way from Jasmine Street, disclosing a huge tripod-camera borrowed surreptitiously from the editor of the *Corsica Call*. He fumbled with something.

"Is it there?" he croaked. "Mr. Scott, is it there?"

The burly man said clearly: "Mr. Queen, it's there."

"Only one?"

"Only one."

"Turn him over." And, after a while, Ellery said: "Is it there?"

And Scott said: "Yes."

"Only one?"

"Yes."

And Ellery raised something high above his head, directing the eye of the camera with his other hand upon what lay in the mud-coated coffin and made a convulsive fist, and something blue as witchfire flashed to the accompaniment of a reverberating boom, lighting up the hillside momentarily like a flare in purgatory.

And Ellery paused in his labors and leaned on his spade and said: "Let me tell you a story." Michael Scott worked on relentlessly, his broad back writhing with his exertions. Father Anthony sat on the rewrapped camera-bundle and cupped his old face in his hands.

"Let me tell you," said Ellery tonelessly, "a story of remarkable cleverness that was thwarted by. . . . There is a God, Father.

"When I discovered that the highboy in McGovern's room was out of its customary position, apparently moved to its new place some time within the general period of the murder, I saw that it was possible the murderer himself had so moved it. If he had, there must have been a reason for the action. I pushed aside the highboy and found on the wall behind it a foot or so from the wainscoting a small circular impression in the plaster. This dent and the highboy before it were in a direct line with two objects: the cane-chair facing the door in which McGovern had presumably been sitting when he was shot, and the doorway where the murderer must have been standing when he squeezed the trigger. Coincidence? It did not seem likely.

"I saw at once that the dent was just such a dent as might have been made by a bullet—a spent bullet, since the depression was so shallow. It was also evident that since the murderer must have been standing, and the victim sitting—being shot through the heart besides—then the dent on the wall several yards behind the chair would appear, if it was caused by a bullet fired by the murderer, just about where I found it, the line of fire being generally downward."

The clods thumped and bumped on the box.

"Now it was also evident," said Ellery in a strange voice, gripping the spade, "that had the spent bullet been one which had passed through McGovern's body there should be a hole in the cane-meshed back of McGovern's chair. I examined the chair; there was no bullet-hole. Then it was possible the bullet which had made the dent in the wall had not passed through McGovern's body but had gone wild; in other words, that two shots had been fired that stormy, noisy night, the one which lodged in the body and the one which caused the dent. But no mention had been made of a second bullet having been found in the room, despite unanimous testimony that the room had been thoroughly searched. I myself inspected every inch of that floor without success. But if a second bullet was not there, then it must have been taken away by the murderer at the same time he moved the highboy over to conceal the dent the bullet had made." He paused and gloomily eyed the filling grave. "But why should the murderer take away one bullet and leave the vital one to be found—the one in the victim's body? It did not make sense. On the other hand, its alternative did make sense. That there never had been two bullets at all; *that only one bullet had been fired.*"

The hillside quivered in shadow as the witches danced.

"I worked," continued Ellery wearily, "on this theory. If only one bullet had been fired, then it was that bullet which had killed McGovern, piercing his heart and emerging from his back, penetrating the cane of the chair-back, and winging on across the room to strike the wall where I found the dent; falling, spent, to the floor below. Then why didn't McGovern's chair show a bullet-hole? It could only be because it was *not* McGovern's chair.

The murderer had done one thing to conceal the fact that the bullet had emerged from the body: he had moved the highboy. Why not another? So he much have exchanged chairs. All your rooms, Mr. Scott, are identically furnished; he dragged McGovern's chair to his own room and brought his own chair to replace McGovern's. All my deductions up to this point would be demonstrated correct if I could find the cane-backed chair with a hole in its back—a hole where a hole should be, just at the place where a bullet would penetrate if it had gone through the heart of some one sitting in the chair. And find it I did—in the room of some one in your house, Mr. Scott."

The ugly raw earth was level with the hillside now; only a little heap was left. Father Anthony watched his friend with veiled and anguished eyes; and for an instant the black cloud draped the moon and they were in darkness.

"Why," muttered Ellery, "should the murderer want to conceal the fact that a spent bullet existed? There could be only one reason: he did not wish the bullet found and examined. But a bullet *was* found and examined." The cloud edged off angrily, and the moon glowered at them again. "Then the bullet which *was* found must have been *the wrong one!*"

At last it was done: the mound loomed, round and dark and smooth, in the moonlight. Father Anthony absently reached for the small wooden grave-marker and thrust it into the mound. Michael Scott rose to his full height, wiping his brow.

"The wrong bullet?" he said hoarsely.

"The wrong bullet. For what did that bullet's being found accomplish? It directly involved Roger Bowen as the murderer; it was a bullet demonstrably from Bowen's .38 automatic. But if it was the wrong bullet, then Bowen was being framed by some one who, unable by reason of Bowen's nightly vigilance to get hold of Bowen's automatic, but possessing a *spent bullet which had already been fired* from Bowen's automatic, was able after the murder to switch Bowen's—as it were—innocent bullet for the one actually used to kill McGovern!" Ellery's voice rose stridently. "The bullet from the murderer's gun wouldn't show the telltale bore-markings of Bowen's gun, naturally. Had the murderer

left his own bullet to be found, tests would have shown that it didn't come from Bowen's .38 and would have instantly defeated the frameup. So the murderer had to take away the real, the lethal, bullet, conceal the dent in the wall, change cane-back chairs."

"But why," demanded Scott in a strangled growl, "didn't the damn' fool leave the chair there and let the dent be found? Why didn't he just take away his own bullet and drop Bowen's on the floor in its place? That would have been the easiest thing to do. And then he wouldn't have had to cover up the fact that the slug had gone clear through the body."

"A good question," said Ellery softly. "Why, indeed? If he didn't do it that way, then it must have been that he couldn't do it that way. He didn't have on him at the time of the murder the spent bullet he had stolen from Bowen; he'd left it somewhere he couldn't get it on the spur of the moment."

"Then he didn't expect the bullet would go clear through the body," cried Scott, waving his huge arms so that their shadows slashed across McGovern's ugly grave. "And he must have expected to be able to substitute Bowen's bullet for the real slug *afterwards*, after the killing, after the police examination, after . . ."

"That's it," murmured Ellery, "exactly. That—" He stopped. A ghost in diaphanous white garments was floating up the hillside toward them, skimming the dark earth. Father Anthony rose, and he looked taller than a man should look. Ellery gripped his spade.

But Michael Scott called harshly: "Iris! What—"

She flung herself wildly at Ellery. "Mr. Queen!" she gasped. "They're—they're coming! They found out—some one saw you and father and Father Anthony come this way with the spades. . . . Pringle came for Sam Dodd. . . . I ran—"

"Thank you, Iris," said Ellery gently. "Among your other virtues you number courage, too." But he made no move to go.

"Let's roll," muttered Michael Scott. "I don't want—"

"Is it a crime," murmured Ellery, "to seek communion with the blessed dead? No, I wait."

Two dots appeared, became dancing dolls, loomed larger,

scrambled frantically up the slope. The first was large and fat, something winked dully in his hand. Behind him struggled a small white-faced man.

"Michael!" snarled Chief Pringle, waving his revolver. "Father! You, there, Queen! What the hell d'ye call this? Are ye all out of your minds? Diggin' up graves!"

"Thank God," panted the coroner. "We're not too late. They haven't dug—" He eyed the mound, the tools gratefully. "Mr. Queen, you know it's against the law to—"

"Chief Pringle," said Ellery, regretfully, stepping forward and fixing the coroner with his gray eyes, "you will arrest this man for the deliberate murder of McGovern and the frame-up of Roger Bowen."

The porch was in purple shadow; the moon had long since set and Corsica was asleep; only Iris's white gown glimmered a little, and Michael Scott's pipe glowed fretfully.

"Sam Dodd," he mumbled. "Why, I've know Sam Dodd—"

"Oh, Father!" moaned Iris, and groped for the hand of Father Anthony in the rocker beside her.

"It had to be Dodd, you know," said Ellery wearily; his feet were on the railing. "You put your finger on the precise point, Mr. Scott, when you said that the murderer must have expected to be able to make the substitution later, and that he hadn't expected that the bullet he fired would pass clear through McGovern's body. For who could have switched bullets had the bullet remained in McGovern's body, as the murderer expected it to remain before he fired? Only Dodd, the coroner, who makes the autopsy which is mandatory in a murder. Who could have continued to keep unknown the fact that the bullet had passed through McGovern's body? Only Dodd, the undertaker, who prepared the body for burial. Who actually stated that the bullet was *in* the body? Only Dodd, who performed the autopsy; if he were innocent why should he have lied? Who introduced Bowen's bullet in evidence? Only Dodd, who claimed to have recovered it from the heart of the dead man." Iris sobbed a little. "Were there confirmations? Plenty. Dodd lived in this house, and therefore he had

access to McGovern's room that night. Dodd 'found' the body; therefore he could have done everything that was necessary without interference. Dodd as coroner set the time of death; he could have said it was a little later than it actually was to cover up the time he consumed in moving the highboy and switching chairs. Dodd by his own admission had often gone out rabbit-hunting with Roger Bowen; therefore he could easily have secured a spent bullet from Bowen's automatic, a bullet which Bowen had fired but which had missed its target. Dodd, being a coroner, was professionally minded; it took a professional mind to think of bore-marks. Dodd, being a coroner, was ballistically minded and had a microscope to check bore-marks. . . . Then I had proofs. It was in Dodd's room I found the cane-chair with the hole in its back. And, most important, I knew that if McGovern's body on exhumation showed one bullet-wound in the chest and one exit-hole in the back, then I had complete proof that Dodd had lied in his official report and that my whole chain of reasoning was correct. We dug up the body and there was the exit-hole. My photographs will send Dodd to the chair."

"And God, my son?" said Father Anthony quietly from the darkness.

Ellery sighed. "I prefer to think that it was some such Agency that made the bullet Dodd fired completely pierce McGovern's body. Had it lodged in McGovern's heart, as Dodd had every reason to expect it would, there would have been no dent in the wall, no hole in the chair, and therefore no reason to exhume the body. Dodd would have produced Bowen's bullet after autopsy, claiming it was the one he 'dug out,' as he did claim, and Bowen would have been a very unlucky young man."

"But Sam Dodd!" cried Iris, hiding her face in her hands. "I've known him so long, since I was a little girl. He's always been so quiet, so gentle, so—so . . ."

Ellery rose and his shoes creaked on the black porch. He bent over the glimmer of her and cupped her chin in his hand and stared down with the most whimsical yearning into her all-but-invisible face. "Beauty like yours, my dear, is a dangerous gift. Your gentle Sam Dodd killed McGovern to rid himself of one

rival and framed Roger Bowen for the murder to rid himself of the other, you see."

"Rival?" gasped Iris.

"Rival, hell!" growled Scott.

"Your eyes, my son," whispered Father Anthony, "are good."

"Hope springs not only eternal but lethal," said Ellery softly.

"Sam Dodd loves you."

JAMES M. CAIN

The Baby in the Icebox

OF COURSE there was plenty pieces in the paper about what happened out at the place last summer, but they got it all mixed up, so I will now put down how it really was, and specially the beginning of it, so you will see it is not no lies in it.

Because when a guy and his wife begin to play leapfrog with a tiger, like you might say, and the papers put in about that part and not none of the stuff that started it off, and then one day say X marks the spot and next day say it wasn't really no murder but don't tell you what it was, why, I don't blame people if they figure there was something funny about it or maybe that somebody ought to be locked up in the booby hatch. But there wasn't no booby hatch to this, nothing but plain onriness and a dirty rat getting it in the neck where he had it coming to him, as you will see when I get the first part explained right.

Things first begun to go sour between Duke and Lura when they put the cats in. They didn't need no cats. They had a combination auto camp, filling station, and lunchroom out in the country a ways, and they got along all right. Duke run the filling station, and got me in to help him, and Lura took care of the lunchroom and shacks. But Duke wasn't satisfied. Before he got this place he had raised rabbits, and one time he had bees, and another time canary birds, and nothing would suit him now but to

put in some cats to draw trade. Maybe you think that's funny, but out here in California they got every kind of a farm there is, from kangaroos to alligators, and it was just about the idea that a guy like Duke would think up. So he begun building a cage, and one day he showed up with a truckload of wildcats.

I wasn't there when they unloaded them. It was two or three cars waiting and I had to gas them up. But soon as I got a chance I went back there to look things over. And believe me, they wasn't pretty. The guy that sold Duke the cats had went away about five minutes before, and Duke was standing outside the cage and he had a stick of wood in his hand with blood on it. Inside was a dead cat. The rest of them was on a shelf, that had been built for them to jump on, and every one of them was snarling at Duke.

I don't know if you ever saw a wildcat, but they are about twice as big as a house cat, brindle gray, with tufted ears and a bobbed tail. When they set and look at you they look like a owl, but they wasn't setting and looking now. They was marching around, coughing and spitting, their eyes shooting red and green fire, and it was a ugly sight, specially with that bloody dead one down on the ground. Duke was pale, and the breath was whistling through his nose, and it didn't take no doctor to see he was scared to death.

"You better bury that cat," he says to me. "I'll take care of the cars."

I looked through the wire and he grabbed me. "Look out!" he says. "They'd kill you in a minute."

"In that case," I says, "how do I get the cat out?"

"You'll have to get a stick," he says, and shoves off.

I was pretty sore, but I begun looking around for a stick. I found one, but when I got back to the cage Lura was there. "How did that happen?" she says.

"I don't know," I says, "but I can tell you this much: if there's any more of them to be buried around here, you can get somebody else to do it. My job is to fix flats, and I'm not going to be no cat undertaker."

She didn't have nothing to say to that. She just stood there while I was trying the stick, and I could hear her toe snapping up and down in the sand, and from that I knowed she was chok-

ing it back, what she really thought, and didn't think no more of this here cat idea than I did.

The stick was too short. "My," she says, pretty disagreeable, "that looks terrible. You can't bring people out here with a thing like that in there."

"All right," I snapped back. "Find me a stick."

She didn't make no move to find no stick. She put her hand on the gate. "Hold on," I says. "Them things are nothing to monkey with."

"Huh," she says. "All they look like to me is a bunch of cats."

There was a kennel back of the cage, with a drop door on it, where they was supposed to go at night. How you got them back there was bait them with food, but I didn't know that then. I yelled at them, to drive them back in there, but nothing happened. All they done was yell back. Lura listened to me awhile, and then she give a kind of gasp like she couldn't stand it no longer, opened the gate, and went in.

Now believe me, that next was a bad five minutes, because she wasn't hard to look at, and I hated to think of her getting mauled up by them babies. But a guy would of had to of been blind if it didn't show him that she had a way with cats. First thing she done, when she got in, she stood still, didn't make no sudden motions or nothing, and begun to talk to them. Not no special talk. Just "Pretty pussy, what's the matter, what they been doing to you?"—like that. Then she went over to them.

They slid off, on their bellies, to another part of the shelf. But she kept after them, and got her hand on one, and stroked him on the back. Then she got ahold of another one, and pretty soon she had give them all a pat. Then she turned around, picked up the dead cat by one leg, and come out with him. I put him on the wheelbarrow and buried him.

Now, why was it that Lura kept it from Duke how easy she had got the cat out and even about being in the cage at all? I think it was just because she didn't have the heart to show him up to hisself how silly he looked. Anyway, at supper that night, she never said a word. Duke, he was nervous and excited and

told all about how the cats had jumped at him and how he had to bean one to save his life, and then he give a long spiel about cats and how fear is the only thing they understand, so you would of thought he was Martin Johnson just back from the jungle or something.

But it seemed to me the dishes was making quite a noise that night, clattering around on the table, and that was funny, because one thing you could say for Lura was: she was quiet and easy to be around. So when Duke, just like it was nothing at all, asks me by the way how did I get the cat out, I heard my mouth saying, "With a stick," and not nothing more. A little bird flies around and tells you, at a time like that. Lura let it pass. Never said a word. And if you ask me, Duke never did find out how easy she could handle the cats, and that ain't only guesswork, but on account of something that happened a little while afterward, when we got the mountain lion.

A mountain lion is a cougar, only out here they call them a mountain lion. Well, one afternoon about five o'clock this one of ours squat down on her hunkers and set up the worst squalling you ever listen to. She kept it up all night, so you wanted to go out and shoot her, and next morning at breakfast Duke come running in and says come on out and look what happened. So we went out there, and there in the cage with her was the prettiest he mountain lion you ever seen in your life. He was big, probably weighed a hundred and fifty pounds, and his coat was a pearl gray so glossy it looked like a pair of new gloves, and he had a spot of white on his throat. Sometimes they have white.

"He come down from the hills when he heard her call last night," says Duke, "and he got in there somehow. Ain't it funny? When they hear that note nothing can stop them."

"Yeah," I says. "It's love."

"That's it," says Duke. "Well, we'll be having some little ones soon. Cheaper'n buying them."

After he had went off to town to buy the stuff for the day, Lura sat down to the table with me. "Nice of you," I says, "to let Romeo in last night."

"Romeo?" she says.

"Yes, Romeo. That's going to be papa of twins soon, out in the lion cage."

"Oh," she says, "didn't he get in there himself?"

"He did not. If she couldn't get out, how could he get in?"

All she give me at that time was a dead pan. Didn't know nothing about it at all. Fact of the matter, she made me a little sore. But after she brung me my second cup of coffee she kind of smiled. "Well?" she says. "You wouldn't keep two loving hearts apart, would you?"

So things was, like you might say, a little gritty, but they got a whole lot worse when Duke come home with Rajah, the tiger. Because by that time he had told so many lies that he begun to believe them hisself, and put on all the airs of a big animal trainer. When people come out on Sundays, he would take a black snake whip and go in with the mountain lions and wildcats, and snap it at them, and they would snarl and yowl, and Duke acted like he was doing something. Before he went in, he would let the people see him strapping on a big six-shooter, and Lura got sorer by the week.

For one thing, he looked so silly. She couldn't see nothing to going in with the cats, and specially she couldn't see no sense in going in with a whip, a six-shooter, and a ten-gallon hat like them cow people wears. And for another thing, it was bad for business. In the beginning, when Lura would take the customers' kids out and make out the cat had their finger, they loved it, and they loved it still more when the little mountain lions come and they had spots and would push up their ears to be scratched. But when Duke started that stuff with the whip it scared them to death, and even the fathers and mothers was nervous, because there was the gun and they didn't know what would happen next. So business begun to fall off.

And then one afternoon he put down a couple of drinks and figured it was time for him to go in there with Rajah. Now it had took Lura one minute to tame Roger. She was in there sweeping

out his cage one morning when Duke was away, and when he started sliding around on his belly he got a bucket of water in the face, and that was that. From then on he was her cat. But what happened when Duke tried to tame him was awful. The first I knew he was up to was when he made a speech to the people from the mountain-lion cage telling them not to go away yet, there was more to come. And when he come out he headed over to the tiger.

"What's the big idea?" I says. "What you up to now?"

"I'm going in with that tiger," he says. "It's got to be done, and I might as well do it now."

"Why has it got to be done?" I says.

He looked at me like as though he pitied me.

"I guess there's a few things about cats you don't know yet," he says. "You got a tiger on your hands, you got to let him know who's boss, that's all."

"Yeah?" I says. "And who *is* boss?"

"You see that?" he says, and cocks his finger at his face.

"See what?" I says.

"The human eye," he says. "The human eye, that's all. A cat's afraid of it. And if you know your business, you'll keep him afraid of it. That's all I'll use, the human eye. But of course, just for protection, I've got these too."

"Listen, sweetheart," I says to him. "If you give me a choice between the human eye and a Bengal tiger, which one *I* got the most fear of, you're going to see a guy getting a shiner every time. If I was you, I'd lay off that cat."

He didn't say nothing: hitched up his holster, and went in. He didn't even get a chance to unlimber his whip. That tiger, soon as he saw him, begun to move around in a way that made your blood run cold. He didn't make for Duke first, you understand. He slid over, and in a second he was between Duke and the gate. That's one thing about a tiger you better not forget if you ever meet one. He can't work examples in arithmetic, but when it comes to the kind of brains that mean meat, he's the brightest boy in the class and then some. He's born knowing

more about cutting off a retreat than you'll ever know, and his legs do it for him, just automatic, so his jaws will be free for the main business of the meeting.

Duke backed away, and his face was awful to see. He was straining every muscle to keep his mouth from sliding down in his collar. His left hand fingered the whip a little, and his right pawed around, like he had some idea of drawing the gun. But the tiger didn't give him time to make up his mind what his idea was, if any.

He would slide a few feet on his belly, then get up and trot a step or two, then slide on his belly again. He didn't make no noise, you understand. He wasn't telling Duke, "Please go away"; he meant to kill him, and a killer don't generally make no more fuss than he has to. So for a few seconds you could even hear Duke's feet sliding over the floor. But all of a sudden a kid begun to whimper, and I come to my senses. I run around to the back of the cage, because that was where the tiger was crowding him, and I yelled at him.

"Duke!" I says. "In his kennel! Quick!"

He didn't seem to hear me. He was still backing, and the tiger was still coming. A woman screamed. The tiger's head went down, he crouched on the ground, and tightened every muscle. I knew what that meant. Everybody knew what it meant, and specially Duke knew what it meant. He made a funny sound in his throat, turned, and ran.

That was when the tiger sprung. Duke had no idea where he was going, but when he turned he fell through the trap door and I snapped it down. The tiger hit it so hard I thought it would split. One of Duke's legs was out, and the tiger was on it in a flash, but all he got on that grab was the sole of Duke's shoe. Duke got his leg in somehow and I jammed the door down tight.

It was a sweet time at supper that night. Lura didn't see this here, because she was busy in the lunchroom when it happened, but them people had talked on their way out, and she knowed all about it. What she said was plenty. And Duke, what do you think he done? He passed it off like it wasn't nothing at all. "Just one of them things you got to expect," he says. And then he let

on he knowed what he was doing all the time, and the only lucky part of it was that he didn't have to shoot a valuable animal like Rajah was. "Keep cool, that's the main thing," he says. "A thing like that can happen now and then, but never let a animal see you excited."

I heard him, and I couldn't believe my ears, but when I looked at Lura I jumped. I think I told you she wasn't hard to look at. She was a kind of medium size, with a shape that would make a guy leave his happy home, sunburned all over, and high cheekbones that give her eyes a funny slant. But her eyes was narrowed down to slits, looking at Duke, and they shot green where the light hit them, and it come over me all of a sudden that she looked so much like Rajah, when he was closing in on Duke in the afternoon, that she could of been his twin sister.

Next off, Duke got it in his head he was such a big cat man now that he had to go up in the hills and do some trapping. Bring in his own stuff, he called it.

I didn't pay much attention to it at the time. Of course, he never brought in no stuff, except a couple of raccoons that he probably bought down the road for two dollars, but Duke was the kind of a guy that every once in a while has to sit on a rock and fish, so when he loaded up the flivver and blew, it wasn't nothing you would get excited about. Maybe I didn't really care what he was up to, because it was pretty nice, running the place with Lura with him out of the way, and I didn't ask no questions. But it was more to it than cats or 'coons or fish, and Lura knowed it, even if I didn't.

Anyhow, it was while he was away on one of them trips of his that Wild Bill Smith, the Texas Tornado, showed up. Bill was a snake doctor. He had a truck, with his picture painted on it, and two or three boxes of old rattlesnakes with their teeth pulled out, and he sold snake oil that would cure what ailed you, and a Indian herb medicine that would do the same. He was a fake, but he was big and brown and had white teeth, and I guess he really wasn't no bad guy. The first I seen of him was when he drove up

in his truck, and told me to gas him up and look at his tires. He had a bum differential that made a funny rattle, but he said never mind and went over to the lunchroom.

He was there a long time, and I thought I better let him know his car was ready. When I went over there, he was setting on a stool with a sheepish look on his face, rubbing his hand. He had a snake ring on one finger, with two red eyes, and on the back of his hand was red streaks. I knew what that meant. He had started something and Lura had fixed him. She had a pretty arm, but a grip like iron, that she said come from milking cows when she was a kid. What she done when a guy got fresh was take hold of his hand and squeeze it so the bones cracked, and he generally changed his mind.

She handed him his check without a word, and I told him what he owed on the car, and he paid up and left.

"So you settled his hash, hey?" I says to her.

"If there's one thing gets on my nerves," she says, "it's a man that starts something the minute he gets in the door."

"Why didn't you yell for me?"

"Oh, I didn't need no help."

But the next day he was back, and after I filled up his car I went over to see how he was behaving. He was setting at one of the tables this time, and Lura was standing beside him. I saw her jerk her hand away quick, and he give me the bright grin a man has when he's got something he wants to cover up. He was all teeth. "Nice day," he says. "Great weather you have in this country."

"So I hear," I says. "Your car's ready."

"What I owe you?" he says.

"Dollar twenty."

He counted it out and left.

"Listen," says Lura, "we weren't doing anything when you come in. He was just reading my hand. He's a snake doctor, and knows about the zodiac."

"Oh, wasn't we?" I says. "Well, wasn't we nice!"

"What's it to you?" she says.

"Nothing," I snapped at her. I was pretty sore.

"He says I was born under the sign of Yin," she says. You would of thought it was a piece of news fit to put in the paper.

"And who is Yin?" I says.

"It's Chinese for tiger," she says.

"Then bite yourself off a piece of raw meat," I says, and slammed out of there. We didn't have no nice time running the joint *that* day.

Next morning he was back. I kept away from the lunchroom, but I took a stroll and seen them back there with the tiger. We had hauled a tree in there by that time, for Rajah to sharpen his claws on, and she was setting on that. The tiger had his head in her lap, and Wild Bill was looking through the wire. He couldn't even draw his breath. I didn't go near enough to hear what they was saying. I went back to the car and begin blowing the horn.

He was back quite a few times after that, in between while Duke was away. Then one night I heard a truck drive up. I knowed that truck by its rattle. And it was daylight before I heard it go away.

Couple weeks after that Duke come running over to me at the filling station. "Shake hands with me," he says. "I'm going to be a father."

"Gee," I says, "that's great!"

But I took good care he wasn't around when I mentioned it to Lura.

"Congratulations," I says. "Letting Romeos into the place seems to be about the best thing you do."

"What do you mean?" she says.

"Nothing," I says. "Only I heard him drive up that night. Look like to me the moon was under the sign of Cupid. Well, it's nice if you can get away with it."

"Oh," she says.

"Yeah," I says. "A fine double cross you thought up. I didn't know they tried that any more."

She set and looked at me, and then her mouth begin to twitch and her eyes filled with tears. She tried to snuffle them up but it didn't work. "It's not any double cross," she says. "That night, I

never went out there. And I never let anybody in. I was supposed to go away with him that night, but—"

She broke off and began to cry. I took her in my arms. "But then you found this out?" I says. "Is that it?" She nodded her head. It's awful to have a pretty woman in your arms that's crying over somebody else.

From then on, it was terrible. Lura would go along two or three days pretty nice, trying to like Duke again on account of the baby coming, but then would come a day when she looked like some kind of a hex, with her eyes all sunk in so you could hardly see them at all, and not a word out of her.

Them bad days, anyhow when Duke wasn't around, she would spend with the tiger. She would set and watch him sleep, or maybe play with him, and he seemed to like it as much as she did. He was young when we got him, and mangy and thin, so you could see his slats. But now he was about six years old, and had been fed good, so he had got his growth and his coat was nice, and I think he was the biggest tiger I ever seen. A tiger, when he is really big, is a lot bigger than a lion, and sometimes when Rajah would be rubbing around Lura, he looked more like a mule than a cat.

His shoulders come up above her waist, and his head was so big it would cover both her legs when he put it in her lap. When his tail would go sliding past her it looked like some kind of a constrictor snake. His teeth were something to make you lie awake nights. A tiger has the biggest teeth of any cat, and Rajah's must have been four inches long, curved like a cavalry sword, and ivory white. They were the most murderous-looking fangs I ever set eyes on.

When Lura went to the hospital it was a hurry call, and she didn't even have time to get her clothes together. Next day Duke had to pack her bag, and he was strutting around, because it was a boy, and Lura had named him Ron. But when he come out with the bag he didn't have much of a strut. "Look what I

found," he says to me, and fishes something out of his pocket. It was the snake ring.

"Well?" I says. "They sell them in any ten-cent store."

"H'm," he says, and kind of weighed the ring in his hand. That afternoon, when he come back, he says: "Ten-cent store, hey? I took it to a jeweler today, and he offered me two hundred dollars for it."

"You ought to sold it," I says. "Maybe save you bad luck."

Duke went away again right after Lura come back, and for a little while things was all right. She was crazy about the little boy, and I thought he was pretty cute myself, and we got along fine. But then Duke come back and at lunch one day he made a crack about the ring. Lura didn't say nothing, but he kept at it, and pretty soon she wheeled on him.

"All right," she says. "There was another man around here, and I loved him. He give me that ring, and it meant that he and I belonged to each other. But I didn't go with him, and you know why I didn't. For Ron's sake, I've tried to love you again, and maybe I can yet, God knows. A woman can do some funny things if she tries. But that's where we're at now. That's right where we're at. And if you don't like it, you better say what you're going to do."

"When was this?" says Duke.

"It was quite a while ago. I told you I give him up, and I give him up for keeps."

"It was just before you knowed about Ron, wasn't it?" he says.

"Hey," I cut in. "That's no way to talk."

"Just what I thought," he says, not paying no attention to me. "Ron. That's a funny name for a kid. I thought it was funny, right off when I heard it. Ron. Ron. That's a laugh, ain't it?"

"That's a lie," she says. "That's a lie, every bit of it. And it's not the only lie you've been getting away with around here. Or think you have. Trapping up in the hills, hey? And what do you trap?"

But she looked at me and choked it back. I begun to see that the cats wasn't the only things that had been gumming it up.

"All right," she wound up. "Say what you're going to do. Go on. Say it!"

But he didn't.

"Ron," he cackles, "that's a hot one," and walks out.

Next day was Sunday, and he acted funny all day. He wouldn't speak to me or Lura, and once or twice I heard him mumbling to himself. Right after supper he says to me, "How are we on oil?"

"All right," I says. "The truck was around yesterday."

"You better drive in and get some," he says. "I don't think we got enough."

"Enough?" I says. "We got enough for two weeks."

"Tomorrow is Sunday," he says, "and there'll be a big call for it. Bring out a hundred gallon and tell them to put it on the account."

By that time I would give in to one of his nutty ideas rather than have an argument with him, and besides, I never tumbled that he was up to anything. So I wasn't there for what happened next, but I got it out of Lura later, so here is how it was:

Lura didn't pay much attention to the argument about the oil, but washed up the supper dishes, and then went in the bedroom to make sure everything was all right with the baby. When she come out she left the door open, so she could hear if he cried. The bedroom was off the sitting room, because these here California houses don't have but one floor, and all the rooms connect. Then she lit the fire, because it was cool, and sat there watching it burn. Duke come in, walked around, and then went out back. "Close the door," she says to him. "I'll be right back," he says.

So she sat looking at the fire, she didn't know how long, maybe five minutes, maybe ten minutes. But pretty soon she felt the house shake. She thought maybe it was a earthquake, and looked at the pictures, but they was all hanging straight. Then she felt the house shake again. She listened, but it wasn't no truck outside that would cause it, and it wouldn't be no state-road blasting or nothing like that at that time of night. Then she felt it shake again, and this time it shook in a regular movement, one, two, three,

four, like that. And then all of a sudden she knew what it was, why Duke had acted so funny all day, why he had sent me off for the oil, why he had left the door open, and all the rest of it. There was five hundred pounds of cat walking through the house, and Duke had turned him loose to kill her.

She turned around, and Rajah was looking at her, not five foot away. She didn't do nothing for a minute, just set there thinking what a boob Duke was to figure on the tiger doing his dirty work for him, when all the time she could handle him easy as a kitten, only Duke didn't know it. Then she spoke. She expected Rajah to come and put his head in her lap, but he didn't. He stood there and growled, and his ears flattened back. That scared her, and she thought of the baby. I told you a tiger has that kind of brains. It no sooner went through her head about the baby than Rajah knowed she wanted to get to that door, and he was over there before she could get out of the chair.

He was snarling in a regular roar now, but he hadn't got a whiff of the baby yet, and he was still facing Lura. She could see he meant business. She reached in the fireplace, grabbed a stick that was burning bright, and walked him down with it. A tiger is afraid of fire, and she shoved it right in his eyes. He backed past the door, and she slid in the bedroom. But he was right after her, and she had to hold the stick at him with one hand and grab the baby with the other.

But she couldn't get out. He had her cornered, and he was kicking up such a awful fuss she knowed the stick wouldn't stop him long. So she dropped it, grabbed up the baby's covers, and threw them at his head. They went wild, but they saved her just the same. A tiger, if you throw something at him with a human smell, will generally jump on it and bite at it before he does anything else, and that's what he done now. He jumped so hard the rug went out from under him, and while he was scrambling to his feet she shot past him with the baby and pulled the door shut after her.

She run in my room, got a blanket, wrapped the baby in it, and run out to the electric icebox. It was the only thing around

the place that was steel. Soon as she opened the door she knowed why she couldn't do nothing with Rajah. His meat was in there; Duke hadn't fed him. She pulled the meat out, shoved the baby in, cut off the current, and closed the door. Then she picked up the meat and went around the outside of the house to the window of the bedroom. She could see Rajah in there, biting at the top of the door, where a crack of light showed through. He reached to the ceiling. She took a grip on the meat and drove at the screen with it. It give way, and the meat went through. He was on it before it hit the floor.

Next thing was to give him time to eat. She figured she could handle him once he got something in his belly. She went back to the sitting room. And in there, kind of peering around, was Duke. He had his gun strapped on, and one look at his face was all she needed to know she hadn't made no mistake about why the tiger was loose.

"Oh," he says, kind of foolish, and then walked back and closed the door. "I meant to come back sooner, but I couldn't help looking at the night. You got no idea how beautiful it is. Stars is bright as anything."

"Yeah," she says. "I noticed."

"Beautiful," he says. "Beautiful."

"Was you expecting burglars or something?" she says, looking at the gun.

"Oh, that," he says. "No. Cat's been kicking up a fuss. I put it on, case I have to go back there. Always like to have it handy."

"The tiger," she says. "I thought I heard him, myself."

"Loud," says Duke. "Awful loud."

He waited. She waited. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of opening up first. But just then there came a growl from the bedroom, and the sound of bones cracking. A tiger acts awful sore when he eats. "What's that?" says Duke.

"I wonder," says Lura. She was hell-bent on making him spill it first.

They both looked at each other, and then there was more growls, and more sound of cracking bones. "You better go in there," says Duke, soft and easy, with the sweat standing out

on his forehead and his eyes shining bright as marbles. "Something might be happening to Ron."

"Do you know what I think it is?" says Lura.

"What's that?" says Duke. His breath was whistling through his nose like it always done when he got excited.

"I think it's that tiger you sent in here to kill me," says Lura. "So you could bring in that woman you been running around with for over a year. That redhead that raises rabbit fryers on the Ventura road. That cat you been trapping!"

"And 'stead of getting you he got Ron," says Duke. "Little Ron! Oh my, ain't that tough? Go in there, why don't you? Ain't you got no mother love? Why don't you call up his pappy, get him in there? What's the matter? Is he afraid of a cat?"

Lura laughed at him. "All right," she says. "Now you go." With that she took hold of him. He tried to draw the gun, but she crumpled up his hand like a piece of wet paper and the gun fell on the floor. She bent him back on the table and beat his face in for him. Then she picked him up, dragged him to the front door, and threw him out. He run off a little ways. She come back and saw the gun. She picked it up, went to the door again, and threw it after him. "And take that peashooter with you," she says.

That was where she made her big mistake. When she turned to go back in the house he shot, and that was the last she knew for a while.

Now, for what happened next, it wasn't nobody there, only Duke and the tiger, but after them state cops got done fitting it all together, combing the ruins and all, it wasn't no trouble to tell how it was, anyway most of it, and here's how they figured it out:

Soon as Duke seen Lura fall, right there in front of the house, he knowed he was up against it. So the first thing he done was run to where she was and put the gun in her hand, to make it look like she had shot herself. That was where he made *his* big mistake, because if he had kept the gun he might of had a chance. Then he went inside to telephone, and what he said was, soon as he got hold of the state police: "For God's sake come out here

quick. My wife has went crazy and throwed the baby to the tiger and shot herself and I'm all alone in the house with him and—*oh, my God, here he comes!*"

Now that last was something he didn't figure on saying. So far as he knowed, the tiger was in the room, having a nice meal off his son, so everything was hotsy-totsy. But what he didn't know was that that piece of burning firewood that Lura had dropped had set the room on fire and on account of that the tiger had got out. How did he get out? We never did quite figure that out. But this is how I figure it, and one man's guess is good as another's:

The fire started near the window, we knew that much. That was where Lura dropped the stick, right next to the cradle, and that was where a guy coming down the road in a car first seen the flames. And what I think is that soon as the tiger got his eye off the meat and seen the fire, he begun to scramble away from it, just wild. And when a wild tiger hits a beaver-board wall, he goes through, that's all. While Duke was telephoning, Rajah come through the wall like a clown through a hoop, and the first thing he seen was Duke, at the telephone, and Duke wasn't no friend, not to Rajah he wasn't.

Anyway, that's how things was when I got there with the oil. The state cops was a little ahead of me, and I met the ambulance with Lura in it, coming down the road seventy mile an hour, but just figured there had been a crash up the road, and didn't know nothing about it having Lura in it. And when I drove up there was plenty to look at all right. The house was in flames, and the police was trying to get in, but couldn't get nowheres near it on account of the heat, and about a hundred cars parked all around, with people looking, and a gasoline pumper cruising up and down the road, trying to find a water connection somewheres they could screw their hose to.

But inside the house was the terrible part. You could hear Duke screaming, and in between Duke was the tiger. And both of them was screams of fear, but I think the tiger was worse. It is a awful thing to hear a animal letting out a sound like that. It kept up about five minutes after I got there, and then all of a sudden you

couldn't hear nothing but the tiger. And then in a minute that stopped.

There wasn't nothing to do about the fire. In a half hour the whole place was gone, and they was combing the ruins for Duke. Well, they found him. And in his head was four holes, two on each side, deep. We measured them fangs of the tiger. They just fit.

Soon as I could I run in to the hospital. They had got the bullet out by that time, and Lura was laying in bed all bandaged around the head, but there was a guard over her, on account of what Duke said over the telephone. He was a state cop. I sat down with him, and he didn't like it none. Neither did I. I knowed there was something funny about it, but what broke your heart was Lura, coming out of the ether. She would groan and mutter and try to say something so hard it would make your head ache. After a while I got up and went in the hall. But then I see the state cop shoot out of the room and line down the hall as fast as he could go. At last she had said it. The baby was in the electric icebox. They found him there, still asleep and just about ready for his milk. The fire had blacked up the outside, but inside it was as cool and nice as a new bathtub.

Well, that was about all. They cleared Lura, soon as she told her story, and the baby in the icebox proved it. Soon as she got out of the hospital she got a offer from the movies, but 'stead of taking it she come out to the place and her and I run it for awhile, anyway the filling-station end, sleeping in the shacks and getting along nice. But one night I heard a rattle from a bum differential, and I never even bothered to show up for breakfast the next morning.

I often wish I had. Maybe she left me a note.

MAX SHULMAN

The Mock Governor

I FIRST SAW HER in Professor Pomfritt's political science class. In a sweater. When the class was over, I came up to her. "I'll get right to the point," I said. "I love you."

"You kill me," she said.

"You are the most beautiful woman in the freshman class," I said.

"You knock me out," she said.

"Possibly in the whole University of Minnesota," I said.

"You fracture me," she said.

"Take me to meet your folks," I said.

"They're on a world cruise," she said. "I'm living with my uncle."

"Take me to meet him."

"He won't like you."

"He'll like me."

"You don't know my uncle."

"I know this: he must be beautiful to have such a beautiful niece."

"You got rocks in your head," she said.

"I got a convertible too."

"A convertible head?"

"No, a convertible coupé. Let's go."

We went. We parked down by the riverbank and necked for a

couple of hours. Then she said, "My name is Pearl McBride."

"How do you do," I said. "I'm Dobie Gillis."

"How do you do," she said. "What time is it?"

"A quarter to seven."

"Holy smoke, I'm late for dinner. Get me home quick, Dobie. The last time a boy brought me home late my uncle tore off a garage door and broke it over his head."

"Listen," I said, speeding away, "when I get in front of your house, I'll slow down and you jump off."

"Nonsense. You're coming in and meet my uncle."

"But," I trembled, "a garage door—"

"Unless," she said, "you endear yourself to my uncle, our romance will never blossom. You don't want that, do you?"

I looked at her curly blond hair, at her big blue eyes, at her rose-red lips, at her sweater. "No," I said truthfully.

"Then you'll have to face my uncle. He's really not so tough. He's a pushover for flattery. Give him some sweet talk."

"About what?" I asked.

"He's in the construction business. Talk about that."

"I don't know anything about construction."

"You've watched excavations, haven't you?"

"No," I said. "I get dizzy."

"Talk politics to him," Pearl suggested. "He's got an idea that he wants to be governor of Minnesota."

"A commendable ambition. What are his qualifications?"

"A strong handshake," she said.

"Anything else?"

"He smokes cigars and he talks real loud."

"Clearly the man for the job," I said.

"He's been sending up trial balloons, letting it be known around town that he's available for the nomination."

"What's happened?" I asked.

"Silence, mostly. Occasionally some giggles."

We pulled up in front of her house, a six-story concrete bunker with stained-glass windows. "My uncle had some cement left over from a dam he built," she explained.

"How about the windows?"

"Left over from a church. Come on."

"Wait, Pearl," I said, clutching the steering wheel, "perhaps it would be better if I came back tomorrow."

"Come on." She pulled me up the path by my necktie. "Don't forget—flatter him."

The front door opened and out came a livid man about eight feet tall. "Where have you been?" he thundered.

"This is Dobie Gillis," said Pearl. "My uncle, Emmett McBride."

I extended a panicky hand. "I am proud, sir," I squeaked, "to meet the next governor of our state."

For a moment he stared at me. Then his hard red face relaxed. He gave my hand a cartilage-mashing shake. "Come in," he rumbled, "come in."

"You're doing fine," Pearl whispered as we entered.

"Pearl," said McBride, "why haven't you had Dobie over here before?"

"We just met this afternoon," said Pearl, "in a political science class. Dobie is majoring in political science. He thinks politics is the highest pursuit of man, don't you, Dobie?"

"Except maybe construction," I replied.

Pearl beamed. McBride beamed. I beamed. We beamed all three.

"Sit down, Dobie," McBride invited. "Do you smoke cigars?"

"No, sir," I said, "but I admire a man who does."

He lit a Perfecto the size of my forearm. "Now what's all this talk about my being governor?"

"It's all over town, sir."

"Really?"

I prodded him playfully in the ribs. "Now don't pretend," I said with a smile, "that you haven't heard about it."

He chuckled, causing the dinner plates in the next room to rattle. "Well," he admitted, "I know that some of my many friends have been talking about it, but I haven't given them any encouragement."

A note of alarm came into my voice. "Sir, you *will* accept the nomination, won't you?"

"Well, I don't know," he said, dropping a mound of ashes on his vest.

I seized one of his thumbs with my two hands. "But you have to!"

"I don't know. I'm a very busy man, you know."

"You have to," I cried. "It's your duty to the people. Today, as never before, the people need leadership. You cannot shirk the responsibility. Say you'll accept, Mr. McBride. Say you will."

"Yes," he said simply.

"Perhaps," said Pearl, twinkling, "Dobie will stay for dinner."

"Of course he will," McBride declared. "Pearl, go tell Cook to set an extra place."

Pearl danced merrily into the kitchen.

"I'd offer you a drink," said McBride, "but I don't keep liquor in the house."

"Oh, that's all right," I said, noticing six bottles of bourbon through the half-open door of a cabinet.

"Man in public life has to be careful, you know," he said.

"Of course."

"Not that I miss it," he continued. "I live a very simple life—plain, wholesome food, a good book in the evening, fishing in the summer in our glorious lakes, hunting in the fall in our glorious woods—"

"What do you hunt?" I asked.

"Glorious deer," replied McBride.

"That must be fun," I said. "All I've ever shot are glorious pheasants."

"Ah," he said passionately, "This state abounds with glorious game."

"It's got people too," I said.

"Glorious people," he said.

"Who deserve a glorious governor," I said.

"Dobie," he said.

"Mr. McBride," I said.

"Dinner," Pearl said.

We sat down to a plain wholesome meal of vichyssoise, lobster

Newburgh, artichoke hearts, sirloin Chateaubriand, button mushrooms, and peach melba.

After this snack I asked McBride whether I could take Pearl out for a little while.

"Of course, son," he belched, "but be careful with my little girl." He rose laboriously from his chair and put a Neanderthal paw on her shoulder. "My little girl," he bellowed tenderly. "I like to think of Pearl as my own daughter. I've never had any children of my own." He sighed mightily. "Oh, I can't complain. Life's been good to me. But I think I'd trade all this"—his arm swept around the room, indicating a quarter of a million dollars' worth of overstuffed furniture—"for a child of my own. But that's life, I guess." He blew his big red nose.

"Tough," I said.

"Dobie," he said, "I want you to be the first to have one of these." From his breast pocket he removed a **McBRIDE FOR GOVERNOR** sticker. "Paste it on your windshield."

"How can I thank you enough?" I said.

"Don't try. Run along now and be sure to have Pearl home by ten. Or else," he chuckled, "I will drive you into the ground like a wicket."

I saw him lumbering toward the bourbon as we left. In the car Pearl said, "Now, that wasn't so hard, was it?"

"No," I answered, "but just the same, I'm going to get you home by ten. No sense crowding our luck."

"All right, dear. What shall we do?"

"How about a movie? There's supposed to be a very unusual picture at the Bijou. It *isn't* told in flashback."

"It isn't?" said Pearl. "Then how is it told?"

"They just start at the beginning of the story and go right straight through to the end."

"Revolutionary," said Pearl.

I headed the car toward the Bijou. "Tomorrow night," I suggested, "let's go canoeing."

"Marvy," said Pearl.

"And Friday night we'll go dancing."

"Terrif," said Pearl.

I took her hand. She smiled. I smiled back. Our eyes met. The car ran up on the sidewalk and into a barbershop.

At 11:35 that evening Pearl and I limped up the walk to her house. She had a few yards of tape on her hand. I was uninjured except for a couple of civil and criminal actions pending against me.

McBride came bounding out the door like a big fat jack-in-the-box. "What happened?" he roared.

"Flatter him," Pearl whispered to me and ducked prudently into the house.

"What happened?" repeated McBride, grabbing a handful of my shirt and holding me out at arm's length.

"Oh, sir," I cried, "I can hardly wait until you're governor. The roads in this state are deplorable."

"What," he gritted, "happened?"

"What we need," I said, "is a governor who is also an expert in construction. That's what we need."

He put me down slowly. "What happened?" he asked again.

"You should have seen that disgraceful hole right in the middle of the street," I said. "We'd have both been killed if I hadn't had the presence of mind to drive into a nearby barbershop. Oh, how I wish it was next fall and you were in office."

He rubbed his head for a minute. "How's Pearl?" he asked at length.

"Just a scratch, thank heaven. But there's no telling what will happen to our citizens on these treacherous roads until you are elected and straighten things out."

He sat down on the stoop. "Dobie, listen. You got to be more careful with Pearl. If anything like this ever happens again, I'll—"

"Yes, sir," I interrupted quickly. "I'll be very careful. Good night."

"Good night," he mumbled.

The next night in the canoe, the water lapping softly on the gunwales, the moon bright on Pearl's bandages, she said: "You are a genius."

"Pshaw," I said.

"What a great talent you have for handling people."

"I've got another talent too," I said.

"What?"

"I can tell time. Pearl, it's 9:35. I've got to paddle back to the boat dock and then drive you home by ten. I don't think your uncle Emmett can be pushed much further."

"We'll go in a minute, Dobie. Now lean back."

"Pearl, I think we better leave now."

"Just a few seconds more."

"No."

"Aw, Dobie."

"Well, just a few seconds."

In just a few seconds it was 9:50 and I was frantic. "We'll never make it," I wailed.

"Don't be silly," she said. "It will take you three minutes to get to the boat dock and seven minutes to drive me home. We'll make it."

"Three minutes to the boat dock? You're off your trolley. It took me fifteen minutes to paddle out here."

"Of course," she said. "You were sitting down. Can't make any time that way. Stand up and paddle."

"Stand up?" I asked, aghast.

"Sure. Come on, get up."

"But you're not supposed to stand up in a boat."

"A myth," she said lightly. "Indians did it all the time." I got up shakily. "I'll tip over the boat," I said.

"Nonsense," said Pearl as I tipped over the boat.

It was a little after midnight when I brought Pearl home in a blanket. "Good luck," she sneezed and ran past Uncle Emmett into the house.

"It's shocking," I yelled as McBride chased me around the lawn, "the things that go on in this state. Do you know," I asked, vaulting an iron deer, "that there are boats for rent that are not seaworthy? Things," I said, flattening a tulip bed, "have gotten out of hand. What we need in this state is a strong man in the gov-

ernor's mansion. A man subject neither," I said, capsizing a deck chair, "to fear nor favoritism; a man who will stamp out corruption in high and low places; a man"—he was getting pretty winded—"who will protect the weal of the people; a man stern but just; in short"—he sat abruptly on the grass—"a man like you."

"Dobie," he gasped, "now what have you done?"

"An accident," I replied. "The kind of accident that will not be allowed to happen in your administration."

"Dobie, I'm a patient man—"

"An admirable quality in a governor."

"But this is positively the last time that—"

"Yes, sir. It will never happen again."

"If it does, I'll—"

"Well, I'd better get home now and do some studying for that fascinating political science course. We're having a fascinating test tomorrow. Good night."

He didn't answer.

The next night at the dance I was firm. "We are leaving," I told Pearl, "at nine-thirty."

"But," she protested, "it only takes ten minutes to drive home."

I shook my head and repeated, "We are leaving at nine-thirty."

And promptly at nine-thirty we left. I drove carefully away from the curb. I signaled for all turns, stopped for all lights, passed no cars, kept both hands on the wheel, and never let the speedometer needle get above 25. But all these precautions notwithstanding, halfway home tragedy struck. The motor coughed and died.

I displayed admirable calm. "Pearl," I said quietly, "let us keep our heads. It is twenty minutes before ten. We are a mile from your house. We will get out of the car and walk."

"In these shoes?" asked Pearl, pointing at a pair of flimsy gold things with an arch like a ski slide.

"You can take them off and go barefoot. Or, if you prefer, I'll carry you. In either case, we are leaving immediately. Come on."

"Aren't you even going to lift up the hood and look at the motor?" she asked. "Everybody always does that before they abandon a car."

"I don't know any more about motors than I do about the Koran," I said. "Let's go."

She got out of the car. "Come on, Dobie, let's take a look at the motor. Maybe we'll see something loose or something. Come on, Dobie. It will only take a second to look."

"Oh, all right," I surrendered.

"Goody," she said. "I love to look at motors."

I opened the hood and we peered inside. "You have a nice motor, Dobie," she said.

"Thanks," I murmured.

"All those wires and bolts and things."

"All right, Pearl. We'll start walking now."

"Just a minute, Dobie. I think I see something loose."

"Never mind, Pearl. Let's get going."

"No, Dobie. Look at this little thing over by that little thing."

I looked at this little thing over by that little thing, and sure enough it did seem to have come loose. I fastened it with a pin that seemed to be made for that purpose.

"Now start the car, Dobie. I'll watch."

After extracting a promise from Pearl that we'd leave instantly on foot if the car failed to start, I got back behind the wheel. I stepped on the starter, remembering just too late that the tip of her long, frilly sleeve was resting on the fan belt. There was a ripping and tearing and a pinwheel of flying taffeta.

"It started! It started!" she cried, standing in the street in her dance set.

Uncle Emmett was nowhere in sight when I escorted Pearl up the path, she rakishly dressed in a seat cover. She slipped into the house. I started tiptoeing back to the car. Then I saw him. Or, rather, I saw a garage door racing toward me like an express train. I executed a twenty-foot standing broad jump, landed on all fours, left the knees of my rented tux on the sidewalk, leaped into the car, and set a world's record for speed in first gear.

For the next several days no moon shone on our romance. We saw one another only by daylight, and when I took her home, I dropped her off a safe six blocks away. It was very unsatisfactory. To our credit it must be said that we worked hard on plans to win over Uncle Emmett, but the best of these plans—for me to grow a mustache and call on Pearl under an assumed name—was none too good. Things looked black.

Then one day before our political science class, Pearl ran up to me in a state of high excitement. I could almost hear her brain clicking. "I've got an idea," she said.

"It better be good."

"It's perfect. Listen, Dobie, what does Uncle Emmett want most in the world?"

"To hit me with a garage door."

She made an impatient gesture. "I'm serious. What does he want most?"

"To be governor."

"Exactly. And there's nothing he won't do for anybody who can make him governor." She prodded my chest with her forefinger. "Dobie, you are going to do it."

"It's too dirty a trick on the people of Minnesota," I said. "I won't do it."

"I don't mean real governor," she said. "I mean mock governor."

"What's that?" I asked. "Someone who goes around mocking the governor?"

"You don't understand," she began as the bell rang for the start of the political science class.

"Let's cut class," I suggested, "and you tell me all about it."

She said, "No, we've got to go to class. That's part of the plan."

I shrugged and followed her in. For an hour I nodded through Professor Pomfritt's lecture. When class was over I asked Pearl, "Now what?"

"Now we go up and see Professor Pomfritt."

"What are we going to do with him?"

"First we'll flatter him."

"That," I said, "seems to be the standard approach with you."

I followed Pearl up to the lectern where Professor Pomfritt was gathering up his notes and wondering how he was going to live out the year on his salary.

"Professor Pomfritt," said Pearl, "we want to tell you how much we've been enjoying your lectures. Haven't we, Dobie?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well, thank you, thank you," crowed the professor, his little old eyes crinkling with pleasure.

"We think you give the most stimulating lectures on campus. Don't we, Dobie?"

"Yeah," I said.

"You should have heard me twenty years ago when my lecture notes were still legible," said the professor.

"Nobody," said Pearl, "can accuse you of being an ivory tower professor. Political science is a living, breathing subject, and the way you teach it is real and vital. Isn't it, Dobie?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well," chirped the professor. "Well, well, well. I'd ask you up to my rooms for tea only I don't have any tea. However, if you'd like a cup of warm water—"

"No, thanks," said Pearl. "We got another class."

"Bless me, so do I!" exclaimed Professor Pomfritt and started away. "Come up and chat again."

Pearl grabbed his frayed elbow. "There's one thing, Professor. As you know, a new governor will be elected in Minnesota next fall, and there's been a lot of talk about it among the students."

"So that's what they all talk about while I'm lecturing," mused the professor.

"Your inspirational teaching," said Pearl, taking a deep breath, "has got us all so interested in politics that we can't think of anything else."

"We must talk about this some more," said Professor Pomfritt. "Come over tomorrow afternoon. I will borrow some tea leaves from my Chinese laundryman."

Pearl yanked his elbow, shredding the ancient tweed. "This

can't wait," she said urgently. "The talk about the election is getting very heated. I'm afraid the students may come to blows."

"Dear me," said the professor. "What's to be done?"

"If I may make a suggestion," she replied, "why not hold a mock election in class? It will be a good practical exercise in political science and it will pacify the students."

The professor looked doubtful. "I don't know. I've never done anything like this before."

"I'm sure," Pearl continued, "that there will be a lot of publicity for our mock election. This being an election year, the newspapers will certainly send reporters."

"Newspapers?" said the professor, brightening. "Ah, good. The last time I had my name in the newspapers I got a raise. It was in 1927. I fainted at the Lindbergh parade. Malnutrition, the papers said, and the dean was forced to increase my salary."

"Then it's all settled?" asked Pearl.

"Very well. But you'll have to help me organize this function. I know so little about these things."

"Don't you worry," Pearl reassured him. "I'll take care of everything. We'll have the mock election on Friday. Just leave all the details to me. Goodbye, Professor, and we wish we had more teachers like you, don't we, Dobie?"

"Yeah," I said.

We left the professor and went outside. "Now," said Pearl, "let's get busy. I'll go around to the newspapers and see that they send reporters. You start working on your speech."

"My speech?"

"You are going to nominate Uncle Emmett with a great speech, a stirring speech, a magnificent speech."

"About him? That's a good trick."

"You can do it, Dobie."

"I can?" I said uncertainly. "Well, I'll try. Tell me something about him. Maybe he has an attractive side that I haven't noticed. What about his education?"

"He quit school in the fifth grade," said Pearl. "He was eighteen and so big that all the other kids used to laugh at him."

"Hm," I said. "Well, maybe that's not so bad. So he didn't have an education. He went to work, rose from the ranks, rags to riches. That's good stuff—a self-made man."

"No," said Pearl. "His father left him the business."

"Maybe," I suggested, "I could say that he's real strong."

Pearl shook her head.

"I doubt," I said, "that I can get him any votes by telling how much he eats."

Pearl had an idea. "Why don't you say something like this? In times of reconstruction we need a construction man."

"And in times of retrenchment we need a trencherman."

"Wait," said Pearl. "You've given me an angle. Reconstruction and retrenchment. For reconstruction, a construction man. For retrenchment, a businessman. Even if Uncle Emmett did inherit the company, you can show that it was his own business ability that made it pay off. He's made scads of money. I'll dig up some facts and figures. You will cite evidence to prove what he has built and how much he has earned. A construction man for reconstruction. A businessman for retrenchment. Uncle Emmett, you will demonstrate, is both."

"It might work," I allowed.

"It *will* work and Uncle Emmett will read all about your speech in the papers and he will welcome you back like a long lost son and we can start necking at night again."

"What are we waiting for?" I said, rubbing my hands briskly. "Let's get started."

By election time on Friday we were ready. Pearl had alerted the newspapers. I had composed an eloquent speech based on data that Pearl had copied from a ledger she found in her uncle's desk. Our plans were well laid and synchronized. We were confident.

Pearl, the self-appointed chairwoman, stepped to the lectern. At a table on the side of the room sat a dozen reporters, about whom Professor Pomfritt, with new leather patches on his elbows, hovered like a genial bee. The students were in a festive mood. Pearl rapped for silence.

"Nominations," she said, "are now in order."

I stood and was recognized. "Ladies and gentlemen," said I, loud and clear, "I want to tell you about a fellow Minnesotan named Emmett McBride. Emmett McBride is in the construction business. In the last few years Emmett McBride has constructed the following edifices at the following profits: the First National Bank of Minneapolis—\$1,583,087; the St. Cloud-Chaska highway—\$987,590; the Rochester reservoir—\$798,679; the Sauk Center viaduct—\$807,234; the Bemidji causeway—\$694,589."

"Hooray!" shouted Pearl from the chair.

"I mention these figures," I said, "to prove two things. First, that Emmett McBride is a construction man. Second, that Emmett McBride is a businessman."

"Hooray!" shouted Pearl from the chair.

"In these parlous days of reconstruction and retrenchment," I went on, "do we want a politician in the governor's mansion?"

"No!" shouted Pearl from the chair.

"Do we want a theorist in the governor's mansion?"

"No!" shouted Pearl from the chair.

"Do we want a visionary in the governor's mansion?"

"No!" shouted Pearl from the chair.

"What do we want in the governor's mansion?" I asked.

"A construction man and a businessman," shouted Pearl from the chair.

"Exactly," I said. "And since we can't have two governors, we must find a man who is both a construction man and a businessman. Emmett McBride is both. In these parlous days of reconstruction and retrenchment, we want Emmett McBride in the governor's mansion, that's who we want."

"Hooray!" shouted Pearl from the chair, and from the students the cry came back, "Hooray!"

"Few of you," I said, "have ever heard of Emmett McBride. He has never been a candidate for office. It is fitting that the discovery of Emmett McBride should be made at this university which has been the scene of so many other great discoveries. Here is the source of progress in this state. The people look to us for leadership. Let us supply that leadership. Let us elect Emmett McBride!"

Before the mounting cheers could get out of control, Pearl shouted, "I move that McBride be elected by acclamation."

"You can't make a motion from the chair," cried some finicky parliamentarian, but his voice was lost as the entire assemblage in full throated uproar acclaimed Emmett McBride the victor.

Then I was hoisted on several shoulders and carried around the room. "Uncle Emmett will love you," yelled Pearl as I was carried past her.

"How about his niece?" I asked as I circled her the second time and she nodded energetically and blew kisses.

"I'll be over tomorrow morning—after he's had a chance to read the papers," I said the third time around.

It was all on the front pages the next morning, and I drove to Pearl's house whistling all the way. I walked boldly up the path, threw open the door without knocking, and called cheerily, "Where is lovable old Uncle Emmett?"

Pearl, lying prone on the living-room sofa, lifted a tear-stained face. She looked at me for an instant, then scrambled to her feet. "Run for your life," she cried. "Leave the city. Leave the state. Leave the country if possible."

"What's the gag?" I asked, mystified.

"Hurry! Uncle Emmett will be home any minute. He's already raised his bail."

"Bail?"

"You read the papers, Dobic—all those figures you gave about Uncle Emmett's profits."

"So?"

"So they arrested him this morning for income tax evasion."

JOHN RUSSELL

The Price of the Head

THE POSSESSIONS of Christopher Alexander Pellett were these: his name, which he was always careful to retain intact; a suit of ducks, no longer intact, in which he lived and slept; a continuous thirst for liquor, and a set of red whiskers. Also he had a friend. Now no man can gain friendship, even among the gentle islands of Polynesia, except by virtue of some quality attaching to him. Strength, humor, villainy: he must show some trait by which the friend can catch and hold. How, then, explain the loving devotion lavished upon Christopher Alexander Pellett by Karaki, the company boat boy? This was the mystery at Fufuti.

There was no harm in Pellett. He never quarrelled. He never raised his fist. Apparently he had never learned that a white man's foot, though it wobble ever so, is given him wherewith to kick natives out of the road. He never even cursed anyone except himself and the Chinese half-caste who sold him brandy, which was certainly allowable because the brandy was very bad.

On the other hand, there was no perceptible good in him. He had long lost the will to toil, and lately even the skill to beg. He did not smile, nor dance, nor exhibit any of the amiable eccentricities that sometimes recommend the drunken to a certain toleration. In any other part of the world he must have passed without a struggle. But some chance had drifted him to the beaches where life is as easy as a song and his particular fate had given him a

friend. And so he persisted. That was all. He persisted, a sodden lump of flesh preserved in alcohol.

Karaki, his friend, was a heathen from Bougainville, where some people are smoked and others eaten. Being a black, a Melanesian, he was as much an alien in brown Fufuti as any white. He was a serious, efficient little man with deeply sunken eyes, a great mop of kinky hair, and a complete absence of expression. His tastes were simple. He wore a red cotton kerchief belted around his waist and a brass curtain ring suspended from his nose.

Some powerful chief in his home island had sold Karaki into the service of the trading company for three years, annexing his salary of tobacco and beads in advance. When the time should be accomplished, Karaki would be shipped back to Bougainville, a matter of some eight hundred miles, where he would land no richer than before except in experience. This was the custom. Karaki may have had plans of his own.

It is seldom that one of the black races of the Pacific shows any of the virtues for which subject populations are admired. Fidelity and humility can be exacted from other colors between tan and chocolate. But the black remains the inscrutable savage. His secret heart is his own. Hence the astonishment of Fufuti, which knew the ways of black recruits, when Karaki took the worthless beach-comber to his bosom.

"Hy, you, Johnny," called Moy Jack, the Chinese half-caste. "Better you come catch this fella mahster b'long you. He fella plenty too much drunk, galow."

Karaki left the shade of the copra shed where he had been waiting an hour or more and came forward to receive the sagging bulk that was thrust out of doors. He took it scientifically by wrist and armpit and swung toward the beach. Moy Jack stood on his threshold watching with cynic interest.

"Hy, you," he said; "what name you make so much bobeley 'long that fella mahster? S'pose you bling me all them fella pearl; me pay you one dam fella good trade—my word!"

It annoyed Moy Jack that he had to provide the white man with a daily drunk in exchange for the little seed pearls with which

Pellett was always flush. He knew where those pearls came from. Karaki did forbidden diving in the lagoon to get them. Moy Jack made a good thing of the traffic, but he could have made a much better thing by trading directly with Karaki for a few sticks of tobacco.

"What name you give that fella mahster all them fella pearl?" demanded Moy Jack offensively. "He plenty too much no good, galow. Close up he die altogether."

Karaki did not reply. He looked at Moy Jack once, and the half-caste trailed off into mutterings. For an instant there showed a strange light in Karaki's dull eyes, like the flat, green flicker of a turning shark glimpsed ten fathoms down.

Karaki bore his charge down the beach to the little thatched shelter of pandanus leaves that was all his home. Tenderly he eased Pellett to a mat, pillowed his head, bathed him with cool water, brushed the filth from his hair and whiskers. Pellett's whiskers were true whiskers, the kind that sprout like the barbels of a catfish, and they were a glorious coppery, sun-gilt red. Karaki combed them out with a sandalwood comb. Later he sat by with a fan and kept the flies from the bloated face of the drunkard.

It was a little past midday when something brought him scurrying into the open. For weeks he had been studying every weather sign. He knew that the change was due when the southeast trade begins to harden through this flawed belt of calms and cross-winds. And now, as he watched, the sharp shadows began to blur along the sands and a film crept over the face of the sun.

All Fufuti was asleep. The house boys snored in the back veranda. Under his netting the agent dreamed happily of big copra shipments and bonuses. Moy Jack dozed among his bottles. Nobody would have been mad enough to stir abroad in the noon hour of repose: nobody but Karaki, the untamed black, who cared nothing for custom nor yet for dreams. The light pad of his steps was lost in the surf drone on the barrier reefs. He flitted to and fro like a wraith. And while Fufuti slept he applied himself to a job for which he had never been hired.

Karaki had long ago ascertained two vital facts: where the key to the trade-room was kept and where the rifles and ammuni-

tion were hidden. He opened the trade-room and selected three bolts of turkey red cloth, a few knives, two cases of tobacco, and a fine small axe. There was much else he might have taken as well. But Karaki was a man of simple tastes, and efficient.

With the axe he next forced the rifle chest and removed therefrom one Winchester and a big box of cartridges. With the axe again he broke into the boat-sheds. Finally with the axe he smashed the bottoms out of the whaleboat and the two cutters so they would be of no use to anyone for many days to come. It was really a very handy little axe, a true tomahawk, ground to a shaving edge. Karaki took a workman's pleasure in its keen, deep strokes. It was almost his chief prize.

On the beach lay a big proa, a stout outrigger canoe of the kind Karaki's own people used at Bougainville, so high of prow and stern as to be nearly crescent-shaped. The northwest monsoon of last season had washed it ashore at Fufuti and Karaki had repaired it, by the agent's own order. This proa he now launched in the lagoon, and aboard of it he stored his loot.

Of supplies he had to make a hasty selection. He took a bag of rice and another of sweet potatoes. He took as many coconuts as he could carry in a net in three trips. He took a cask of water and a box of biscuit. And here happened an odd thing.

In his search for the biscuit he came upon the agent's private store of liquor, a dozen bottles of rare Irish whisky. He glanced at them and passed them by. He knew what the stuff was, and he was a savage, a black man. But he passed it by. When Moy Jack heard of that later he remembered what he had seen in Karaki's eyes and ventured the surprising prediction that Karaki would never be taken alive.

When all was ready Karaki went back to his thatch and aroused Christopher Alexander Pellett.

"Hy, mahster, you come 'long me."

Mr. Pellett sat up and looked at him. That is to say, he looked. Whether he saw anything or not belongs among the obscurer questions of psychopathy.

"Too late," said Mr. Pellett profoundly. "This shop is closed. Copy boy! Give all those damned loafers good night. I'm—I'm goin'—bed!"

Whereupon he fell flat on his back.

"Wake up, mahster," insisted Karaki, shaking him. "You too much strong fella sleep. Hy-ah, mahster! Rum! You like'm rum? You catch'm rum any amount—my word! Plenty rum, mahster!"

But even this magic call, which never failed to rouse Pellett from his couch in the mornings, fell now on deaf ears. Pellett had had his skinful, and the fitness of things decreed that he should soak the clock around.

Karaki knelt beside him, pried him up until he could get a shoulder under his middle, and lifted him like a loose bag of meal. Pellett weighed one hundred and fifty pounds; Karaki not much more than a hundred. Yet in some deft coolie fashion of his own the little black man packed his burden, with the feet dragging behind, clear down to the beach. Moreover, he managed to get it aboard the proa. Pellett was half drowned and the proa half swamped. But Karaki managed.

No man saw their departure. Fufuti still dreamed on. Long before the agent awoke to wrath and ruin their queer crescent craft had slipped from the lagoon and faded away on the wings of the trade.

The first day Karaki had all he could do to keep the proa running straight before the wind. Big smoky seas came piling up out of the southeast and would have piled aboard if he had given them the least chance. He was only a heathen who did not know a compass from a degree of latitude. But his forefathers used to people these waters on cockleshell voyages that made the venture of Columbus look like a ride in a ferryboat. Karaki bailed with a tin pan and sailed with a mat and steered with a paddle: but he proceeded.

Along about sunrise Mr. Pellett stirred in the bilge and raised a pea-green face. He took one bewildered glance overside at the seething waste and collapsed with a groan. After a decent inter-

val he tried again, but this was an illusion that would not pass, and he twisted around to Karaki sitting crouched and all aglisten with spray in the stern.

"Rum!" he demanded.

Karaki shook his head, and a haunted look crept into Pellett's eyes.

"Take—take away all that stuff," he begged pathetically, pointing at the ocean.

Thereafter for two days he was very, very sick, and he learned how a small boat in any kind of a sea can move forty-seven different ways within one and the same minute. This was no trifling bit of knowledge, as those who have acquired it can tell. It was nearly fatal to Pellett.

On the third day he awoke with a mouth and a stomach of fumed leather and a great weakness, but otherwise in command of his few faculties. The gale had fallen and Karaki was quietly preparing fresh coconuts. Pellett quaffed two before he thought to miss the brandy with which his breakfast draught was always laced. But when he remembered the milk choked in his throat.

"Me like'm rum."

"No got'm rum."

Pellet looked forward and aft, to windward and to lee. There was a great deal of horizon in sight, but nothing else. For the first time he was aware of a strangeness in events.

"What name you come so far?" he asked.

"We catch'm one big fella wind," explained Karaki.

Pellett was in no condition to question his statement nor to observe from the careful stocking of the proa that they had not been blown to sea on a casual fishing trip. Pellett had other things to think of. Some of the things were pink and others purple and others were striped like the rainbow in most surprising designs, and all were highly novel and interesting. They came thronging up out of the vasty deep to entertain Christopher Alexander Pellett. Which they did.

You cannot cut off alcohol from a man who has been continuously pickled for two years without results more or less pictur-

esque. These were days when the proa went shouting across the empty southern seas to madrigal and choric song. Tied hand and foot and lashed under a thwart, Pellett raved in the numbers of his innocent youth. It would have been singular hearing had there been any to hear, but there was only Karaki, who did not care for the lesser Cavalier poets and on whom whole pages of "Atalanta in Calydon" were quite wasted. Now and then he threw a dipperful of sea water over the white man, or spread a mat to keep the sun from him, or fed him with coconut milk by force. Karaki was a poor audience, but an excellent nurse. Also, he combed Pellett's whiskers twice every day.

They ran into calms. But the trade picked them up again more gently, so that Karaki ventured to make westing, and they fled under skies as bright as polished brass.

*"My heart is within me
As an ash in the fire;
Whosoever hath seen me
Without lute, without lyre,
Shall sing of me grievous things,
even things that were ill
to desire—"*

Thus chanted Christopher Alexander Pellett, whose face began to show a little more like flesh and a little less like rotten kelp.

Whenever a fair chance offered, Karaki landed on the lee of some one of the tiny islets with which the Santa Cruz region is peppered, and would make shift to cook rice and potatoes in the tin dipper. This was risky, for one day the islet proved to be inhabited. Two white men in a cutter came out to stop them. Karaki could not hide his resemblance to a runaway nigger, and he did not try to. But when the cutter approached within fifty yards he suddenly announced himself as a runaway nigger with a gun. He left the cutter sinking and one of the men dead.

"There's a bullet hole alongside me here," said Pellett from under the thwart. "You'd better plug it."

Karaki plugged it and released his passenger, who sat up and

began stretching himself with a certain naive curiosity of his own body.

"So you're real," observed Pellett, staring hard at Karaki. "By George, you *are*, and that's comfort."

He was right. Karaki was very real.

"What side you take'm this fella canoe?"

"Balbi," said Karaki, using the native word for Bougainville.

Pellett whistled. An eight-hundred-mile evasion in an open boat was a considerable undertaking. It enlisted his respect. Moreover, he had just had emphatic proof of the efficiency of this little black man.

"Balbi all some home b'long you?"

"Yes."

"All right, commodore," said Pellet. "Lead on. I don't know why you shipped me for supercargo, but I'll see you through."

Strangely—or perhaps not so strangely—the whole Fufuti interval of his history had been fading from his brain while the poison was ebbing from his tissues. The Christopher Alexander Pellett that emerged was one from earlier years: pretty much of a wreck, it was true, and a feckless, indolent, paltry creature at best, but ordinarily human and rather more than ordinarily intelligent.

He was very feeble at first, but Karaki's diet of coconuts and sweet potatoes did wonders for him, and the time came when he could rejoice in the good salt taste of the spray on his lips and forget for hours together the crazy craving for stimulant. They made a strange crew, this pair—simple savage and convalescent drunkard—but there was never any question as to which was in command. That was well seen in the third week when their food began to fail and Pellett noticed that Karaki ate nothing for a whole day.

"See here, this won't do," he cried. "You've given me the last coconut and kept none for yourself."

"Me no like'm eat," said Karaki shortly.

Christopher Alexander Pellet pondered many matters in long, idle hours while the rush of foam under the proa and the creak and fling of her outriggers were the only sounds between sea and

sky. Sometimes his brow was knotted with pain. It is not always pleasant to be wrenched back into level contact with one's memories. Thoughts are no sweeter company for having long been drowned. He had met the horrors of delirium. He had now to face the livelier devils of his past. He had fled them before.

But here was no escape of any kind. So he turned and grappled with them and laid them one by one.

When they had been at sea twenty-nine days they had nothing left of their provisions but a little water. Karaki doled it out by moistening a shred of coconut husk and giving Pellett the shred to suck. In spite of Pellett's petulant protest, he would take none himself. Again the heathen nursed the derelict, this time through the last stages of thirst, scraping the staves of the cask and feeding him the ultimate drop of moisture on the point of a knife.

On the thirty-sixth day from Fufuti they sighted Choiseul, a great green wall that built up slowly across the west.

Once fairly under its headlands, Karaki might have indulged a certain triumph. He had taken as his target the whole length of the Solomons, some six hundred miles. But to have fetched the broadside of them anywhere in such a craft as the proa through storm and current, without instrument or chart, was distinctly a feat of navigation. Karaki, however, did no celebrating. Instead, he stared long and anxiously over his shoulder into the east.

The wind had been fitful since morning. By noon it was dead calm on a restless, oily sea. A barometer would have told evil tales, but Karaki must have guessed them anyway, for he staggered forward and unstepped the little mast. Then he bound all his cargo securely under the thwarts and put all his remaining strength into the paddle, heading for a small outpost island where a line of white showed beach. They had been very lucky thus far, but they were still two miles offshore when the first rush of the hurricane caught them.

Karaki himself was reduced to a rattle of bones in a dried skin, and Pellett could scarce lift a hand. But Karaki fought for Pellett among the waves that leaped up like sheets of fire on the reef. Why or how they got through neither could have said. Per-

haps because it was written that after drink, illness, madness, and starvation the white man should be saved by the black man again and a last time from ravening waters. When they came ashore on the islet they were both nearly flayed, but they were alive, and Karaki still gripped Pellett's shirt.

For a week they stayed while Pellett fattened on unlimited coconut and Karaki tinkered the proa. It had landed in a water-logged tangle, but Karaki's treasures were safe. He got his bearings from a passing native fisherman, and then he knew that *all* his treasures were safe. His home island lay across Bougainville Strait, the stretch of water just beyond.

"Balbi over there?" asked Pellett.

"Yes," said Karaki.

"And a mighty good thing too," cried Pellett heartily. "This is the limit of British authority, old boy. Big fella mahster b'long Beretani stop'm here, no can go that side."

Karaki was quite aware of it. If he feared one thing in the world, he feared the Fiji High Court and its Resident Commissioner for the Southern Solomons, who did sure justice upon all who transgressed in its jurisdiction. Once beyond the strait he might still be liable for the stolen goods and the broken contract. But never—this was the point—never could he be punished for anything he might choose to do over there in Bougainville.

So Karaki was content.

And so was Christopher Alexander Pellett. His body had been wrung and swept and scoured, and he had downed his devils. Sweet air and sunshine were on his lips and in his heart. His bones were sweet in him. As his vigor returned he swam the lagoon or helped Karaki at the proa. He would spend hours hugging the warm sand or rejoicing in the delicate tracery of some tiny sea-shell, singing softly to himself, while the ground-swell hushed along the beach, savoring life as he never had done.

"Oh, this is good—good!" he said.

Karaki puzzled him. Not that he vexed himself, for a smiling wonder at everything, almost childlike, filled him these days. But he thought of this taciturn savage, how he had capped thankless

service with rarest sacrifice. And now that he could consider soberly, the why of it eluded him. Why? Affection? Friendship? It must be so, and he warmed toward the silent little man with the sunken eyes and the expressionless face from which he could never raise a wink.

"Hy, you, Karaki, what name you no laugh all same me? What? You too much fright 'long that fella stuff you steal? Forget it, you old black scamp. If they ever trouble you, I'll square them somehow. By George, I'll say I stole it myself!"

Karaki only grunted and sat down to clean his Winchester with a bit of rag and some drops of oil he had crushed from a dried coconut.

"No, that don't reach him either," murmured Pellett, baffled. "I'd like to know what's going on under that topknot of yours, old chap. You're like Kipling's cat, that walks by himself. God knows I'm not ungrateful. I wish I could show you—"

He sprang up.

"Karaki! He one big fella friend 'long you: savee? You one big fella friend 'long me: savee? We two dam' big fella friend, my word! . . . What?"

"Yes," said Karaki. No other response. He looked at Pellett and he looked away toward Bougainville. "Yes," he said, "my word," and went on cleaning his gun—the black islander, inscrutable, incomprehensible, an enigma always, and to the end.

The end came two days later at Bougainville.

Under a gorgeous dawn they came into a bay that opened before their prow as with jewelled arms of welcome. The land lay lapped in bright garments like a sleeper half awakened, all flushed and smiling, sensuous, intimate, thrilling with life, breathing warm scents—

These were some of the foolish phrases Pellett babbled to himself as he leaped ashore and ran up on a rocky point to see and to feel and to draw all the charm of the place to himself.

Meanwhile Karaki, that simple and efficient little man, was proceeding methodically about his own affairs. He landed his bolts of cloth, his tobacco, his knives, and the other loot. He landed his

box of cartridges and his rifle and his fine tomahawk. The goods were somewhat damaged by sea water, but the weapons had been carefully cleaned and polished.

Pellett was declaiming poetry aloud to the alluring solitude when he was aware of a gentle footfall and turned, surprised, to find Karaki standing just behind him with the rifle at his hip and the axe in his hand.

"Well," said Pellett cheerfully, "what d'you want, old chappie?"

"Me like," said Karaki, while there gleamed in his eyes the strange light that Moy Jack had glimpsed there, like the flicker of a turning shark; "me like'm too much one fella head b'long you!"

"What? Head! Whose—my head?"

"Yes," said Karaki simply.

That was the way of it. That was all the mystery. The savage had fallen enamored of the head of the beachcomber, and Christopher Alexander Pellett had been betrayed by his fatal red whiskers. In Karaki's country a white man's head, well smoked, is a thing to be desired above wealth, above lands and chiefship's fame, and the love of women. In all Karaki's country was no head like the head of Pellett. Therefore Karaki had served to win it with the patience and single faith of a Jacob. For this he had schemed and waited, committed theft and murder, expended sweat and cunning, starved and denied himself, nursed, watched, tended, fed, and saved his man that he might bring the head alive and on the hoof—so to speak—to the spot where he could remove it at leisure and enjoy the fruits of his labor in safety.

Pellet saw all this at a flash, understood it so far as any white could understand it: the whole elemental and stupendous simplicity of it. And standing there in his new strength and sanity under the fair promise of the morning, he gave a laugh that pealed across the waters and started the sea birds from their cliffs, the deep-throated laugh of a man who fathoms and accepts the last great jest.

For finally, by corrected list, the possessions of Christopher Alexander Pellet were these: his name still intact; the ruins of some

rusty ducks; his precious red whiskers—and a soul which had been neatly recovered, renewed, refurbished, reanimated, and restored to him by his good friend Karaki.

*"Thou shouldst die as he dies,
For whom none sheddeth tears;
Filling thine eyes
And fulfilling thine ears
With the brilliance . . . the bloom
and the beauty . . ."*

Thus chanted Christopher Alexander Pellet over the waters of the bay, and then whirled, throwing wide his arms:

"Shoot, damn you! It's cheap at the price!"

MAX BRAND

Wine on the Desert

There was no hurry, except for the thirst, like clotted salt, in the back of his throat, and Durante rode on slowly, rather enjoying the last moments of dryness before he reached the cold water in Tony's house. There was really no hurry at all. He had almost twenty-four hours' head start, for they would not find his dead man until this morning. After that, there would be perhaps a few hours of delay before the sheriff gathered a sufficient posse and started on his trail. Or perhaps the sheriff would be fool enough to come alone.

Durante had been able to see the wheel and fan of Tony's windmill for more than an hour, but he could not make out the ten acres of the vineyard until he had topped the last rise, for the vines had been planted in a hollow. The lowness of the ground, Tony used to say, accounted for the water that gathered in the well during the wet season. The rain sank through the desert sand through the gravel beneath, and gathered in a bowl of clay hardpan far below. In the middle of the rainless season the well ran dry but long before that, Tony had every drop of the water pumped up into a score of tanks made of cheap corrugated iron. Tender pipe lines carried the water from the tanks to the vines and from time to time let them sip enough life to keep them until the water darkened overhead suddenly, one November day, and the rain came down, and all the earth made a great hushing sound

[200]

as it drank. Durante had heard that whisper of drinking when he was here before; but he never had seen the place in the middle of the long drought.

The windmill looked like a sacred emblem to Durante, and the twenty stodgy, tar-painted tanks blessed his eyes; but a heavy sweat broke out at once from his body. For the air of the hollow, unstirred by wind, was hot and still as a bowl of soup. A reddish soup. The vines were powdered with thin red dust, also. They were wretched, dying things to look at, for the grapes had been gathered, the new wine had been made, and now the leaves hung in ragged tatters.

Durante rode up to the squat adobe house and right through the entrance into the patio. A flowering vine clothed three sides of the little court. Durante did not know the name of the plant, but it had large white blossoms with golden hearts that poured sweetness on the air. Durante hated the sweetness. It made him more thirsty.

He threw the reins of his mule and strode into the house. The water cooler stood in the hall outside the kitchen. There were two jars made of a porous stone, very ancient things, and the liquid which distilled through the pores kept the contents cool. The jar on the left held water; that on the right contained wine. There was a big tin dipper hanging on a peg beside each jar. Durante tossed off the cover of the vase on the left and plunged it in until the delicious coolness closed well above his wrist.

"Hey, Tony," he called. Out of his dusty throat the cry was a mere groaning. He drank and called again, clearly, "Tony!"

A voice pealed from the distance.

Durante, pouring down the second dipper of water, smelled the alkali dust which had shaken off his own clothes. It seemed to him that heat was radiating like light from his clothes, from his body, and the cool dimness of the house was soaking it up. He heard the wooden leg of Tony bumping on the ground, and Durante grinned; then Tony came in with that hitch and side-swing with which he accommodated the stiffness of his artificial leg. His brown face shone with sweat as though a special ray of light were focused on it.

"Ah, Dick!" he said. "Good old Dick!—How long since you came last!—Wouldn't Julia be glad! Wouldn't she be glad!"

"Ain't she here?" asked Durante, jerking his head suddenly away from the dripping dipper.

"She's away at Nogalez," said Tony. "It gets so hot. I said, 'You go up to Nogalez, Julia, where the wind don't forget to blow.' She cried, but I made her go."

"Did she cry?" asked Durante.

"Julia—that's a good girl," said Tony.

"Yeah. You bet she's good," said Durante. He put the dipper quickly to his lips but did not swallow for a moment; he was grinning too widely. Afterward he said: "You wouldn't throw some water into that mule of mine, would you, Tony?"

Tony went out with his wooden leg clumping loud on the wooden floor, softly in the patio dust. Durante found the hammock in the corner of the patio. He lay down in it and watched the color of sunset flush the mists of desert dust that rose to the zenith. The water was soaking through his body; hunger began, and then the rattling of pans in the kitchen and the cheerful cry of Tony's voice:

"What you want, Dick? I got some pork. You don't want pork. I'll make you some good Mexican beans. Hot. Ah ha, I know that old Dick. I have plenty of good wine for you, Dick. Tortillas. Even Julia can't make tortillas like me—. And what about a nice young rabbit?"

"All blowed full of buckshot?" growled Durante.

"No, no. I kill them with the rifle."

"You killed rabbits with a rifle?" repeated Durante, with a quick interest.

"It's the only gun I have," said Tony. "If I catch them in the sights, they are dead—. A wooden leg cannot walk very far—. I must kill them quick. You see? They come close to the house about sunrise and flop their ears. I shoot through the head."

"Yeah? Yeah?" muttered Durante. "Through the head?" He relaxed, scowling. He passed his hand over his face, over his head.

Then Tony began to bring the food out into the patio and lay it

on a small wooden table; a lantern hanging against the wall of the house included the table in a dim half circle of light. They sat there and ate. Tony had scrubbed himself for the meal. His hair was soaked in water and sleeked back over his round skull. A man in the desert might be willing to pay five dollars for as much water as went to the soaking of that hair.

Everything was good. Tony knew how to cook, and he knew how to keep the glasses filled with his wine.

"This is old wine. This is my father's wine. Eleven years old," said Tony. "You look at the light through it. You see that brown in the red? That's the soft that time puts in good wine, my father always said."

"What killed your father?" asked Durante.

Tony lifted his hand as though he were listening or as though he were pointing out a thought.

"The desert killed him. I found his mule. It was dead, too. There was a leak in the canteen. My father was only five miles away when the buzzards showed him to me."

"Five miles? Just an hour—. Good Lord," said Durante. He stared with big eyes. "Just dropped down and died?" he asked.

"No," said Tony. "When you die of thirst, you always die just one way—. First you tear off your shirt, then your undershirt. That's to be cooler—. And the sun comes and cooks your bare skin—. And then you think—there is water everywhere, if you dig down far enough. You begin to dig. The dust comes up your nose. You start screaming. You break your nails in the sand. You wear the flesh off the tips of your fingers, to the bone." He took a quick swallow of wine.

"Without you seen a man die of thirst, how d'you know they start to screaming?" asked Durante.

"They got a screaming look when you find them," said Tony. "Take some more wine. The desert never can get to you here. My father showed me the way to keep the desert away from the hollow. We live pretty good here? No?"

"Yeah," said Durante, loosening his shirt collar. "Yeah, pretty good."

Afterward he slept well in the hammock until the report of a rifle waked him and he saw the color of dawn in the sky. It was such a great, round bowl that for a moment he felt as though he were above, looking down into it.

He got up and saw Tony coming in holding a rabbit by the ears, the rifle in his other hand. "You see?" said Tony. "Breakfast came and called on us!" He laughed.

Durante examined the rabbit with care. It was nice and fat and it had been shot through the head. Through the middle of the head. Such a shudder went down the back of Durante that he washed gingerly before breakfast; he felt that his blood was cooled for the entire day.

It was a good breakfast, too, with flapjacks and stewed rabbit with green peppers, and a quart of strong coffee. Before they had finished, the sun struck through the east window and started them sweating. "Gimme a look at that rifle of yours, Tony, will you?" Durante asked.

"You take a look at my rifle, but don't you steal the luck that's in it," laughed Tony. He brought the fifteen-shot Winchester.

"Loaded right to the brim?" asked Durante.

"I always load it full the minute I get back home," said Tony.

"Tony, come outside with me," commanded Durante.

They went out from the house. The sun turned the sweat of Durante to hot water and then dried his skin so that his clothes felt transparent. "Tony, I gotta be damn mean," said Durante. "Stand right there where I can see you. Don't try to get close—. Now listen—. The sheriff's gunna be along this trail some time today, looking for me. He'll load up himself and all his gang with water out of your tanks. Then he'll follow my sign across the desert. Get me? He'll follow if he finds water on the place. But he's not gunna find water."

"What you done, poor Dick?" said Tony. "Now look.—I could hide you in the old wine cellar where nobody—"

"The sheriff's not gunna find any water," said Durante. "It's gunna be like this."

He put the rifle to his shoulder, aimed, fired. The shot struck the base of the nearest tank, ranging down through the bottom. A

semicircle of darkness began to stain the soil near the edge of the iron wall.

Tony fell on his knees. "No, no, Dick! Good Dick!" he said. "Look! All the vineyard. It will die. It will turn into old, dead wood, Dick—"

"Shut your face," said Durante. "Now I've started, I kinda like the job."

Tony fell on his face and put his hands over his ears. Durante drilled a bullet hole through the tanks, one after another. Afterward, he leaned on the rifle.

"Take my canteen and go in and fill it with water out of the cooling jar," he said. "Snap into it, Tony!"

Tony got up. He raised the canteen, and looked around him, not at the tanks from which the water was pouring so that the noise of the earth dinking was audible, but at the rows of his vineyard. Then he went into the house.

Durante mounted his mule. He shifted the rifle to his left hand and drew out the heavy Colt from its holster. Tony came dragging back to him, his head down. Durante watched Tony with a careful revolver but he gave up the canteen without lifting his eyes. "The trouble with you, Tony," said Durante, "is you're yellow. I'd of fought a tribe of wildcats with my bare hands, before I'd let 'em do what I'm doin' to you. But you sit back and take it."

Tony did not seem to hear. He stretched out his hands to the vines.

"Ah, my God," said Tony. "Will you let them all die?"

Durante shrugged his shoulders. He shook the canteen to make sure that it was full. It was so brimming that there was hardly room for the liquid to make a sloshing sound. Then he turned the mule and kicked it into a dogtrot. Half a mile from the house of Tony, he threw the empty rifle to the ground. There was no sense packing that useless weight, and Tony with his peg leg would hardly come this far.

Durante looked back, a mile or so later, and saw the little image of Tony picking up the rifle from the dust, then staring earnestly after his guest. Durante remembered the neat little hole clipped through the head of the rabbit. Wherever he went, his

trail never could return again to the vineyard in the desert. But then, commencing to picture to himself the arrival of the sweating sheriff and his posse at the house of Tony, Durante laughed heartily.

The sheriff's posse could get plenty of wine, of course, but without water a man could not hope to make the desert voyage, even with a mule or a horse to help him on the way. Durante patted the full, rounding side of his canteen. He might even now begin with the first sip but it was a luxury to postpone pleasure until desire became greater.

He raised his eyes along the trail. Close by, it was merely dotted with occasional bones, but distance joined the dots into an unbroken chalk line which wavered with a strange leisure across the Apache Desert, pointing toward the cool blue promise of the mountains. The next morning he would be among them.

A coyote whisked out of a gully and ran like a gray puff of dust on the wind. His tongue hung out like a little red rag from the side of his mouth; and suddenly Durante was dry to the marrow. He uncorked and lifted his canteen. It had a slightly sour smell; perhaps the sacking which covered it had grown a trifle old. And then he poured a great mouthful of lukewarm liquid. He had swallowed it before his senses could give him warning.

It was wine!

He looked first of all toward the mountains. They were as calmly blue, as distant as when he had started that morning. Twenty-four hours not on water, but on wine!

"I deserve it," said Durante. "I trusted him to fill the canteen—. I deserve it. Curse him!" With a mighty resolution, he quieted the panic in his soul. He would not touch the stuff until noon. Then he would take one discreet sip. He would win through.

Hours went by. He looked at his watch and found it was only ten o'clock. And he had thought that it was on the verge of noon! He uncorked the wine and drank freely and, corking the canteen, felt almost as though he needed a drink of water more than before. He sloshed the contents of the canteen. Already it was horribly light.

Once, he turned the mule and considered the return trip; but he

could remember the head of the rabbit too clearly, drilled right through the center. The vineyard, the rows of old twisted, gnarled little trunks with the bark peeling off—every vine was to Tony like a human life. And Durante had condemned them all to death!

He faced the blue of the mountains again. His heart raced in his breast with terror. Perhaps it was fear and not the suction of that dry and deadly air that made his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth.

The day grew old. Nausea began to work in his stomach, nausea alternating with sharp pains. When he looked down, he saw that there was blood on his boots. He had been spurring the mule until the red ran down from its flanks. It went with a curious stagger, like a rocking horse with a broken rocker; and Durante grew aware that he had been keeping the mule at a gallop for a long time. He pulled it to a halt. It stood with wide-braced legs. Its head was down. When he leaned from the saddle, he saw that its mouth was open. "It's gunna die," said Durante. "It's gunna die—what a fool I been—."

The mule did not die until after sunset. Durante left everything except his revolver. He packed the weight of that for an hour and discarded it, in turn. His knees were growing weak. When he looked up at the stars they shone white and clear for a moment only, and then whirled into little racing circles and scrawls of red.

He lay down. He kept his eyes closed and waited for the shaking to go out of his body, but it would not stop. And every breath of darkness was like an inhalation of black dust. He got up and went on, staggering. Sometimes he found himself running.

Before you die of thirst, you go mad. He kept remembering that. His tongue had swollen big. Before it choked him, if he lanced it with his knife the blood would help him; he would be able to swallow. Then he remembered that the taste of blood is salty.

Once, in his boyhood, he had ridden through a pass with his father and they had looked down on the sapphire of a mountain lake, a hundred thousand million tons of water as cold as snow.

When he looked up, now, there were no stars; and this frightened him terribly. He never had seen a desert night so dark. His eyes were failing, he was being blinded. When the morning came, he would not be able to see the mountains, and he would walk around and around in a circle until he dropped and died.

No stars, no wind; the air as still as the waters of a stale pool, and he in the dregs at the bottom.

He seized his shirt at the throat and tore it away so that it hung in two rags from his hips.

He could see the earth only well enough to stumble on the rocks. But there were no stars in the heavens. He was blind: he had no more hope than a rat in a well. Ah, but Italian devils know how to put poison in wine that will steal all the senses or any one of them: and Tony had chosen to blind Durante.

He heard a sound like water. It was the swishing of the soft deep sand through which he was treading; sand so soft that a man could dig it away with his bare hands.

Afterward, after many hours, out of the blind face of that sky the rain began to fall. It made first a whispering and then a delicate murmur like voices conversing, but after that, just at the dawn, it roared like the hoofs of ten thousand charging horses. Even through that thundering confusion the big birds with naked heads and red, raw necks found their way down to one place in the Apache Desert.

LOUIS UNTERMAYER

The Lure of the Limerick

LIMERICKS MAY BE DIVIDED into three categories: the simple, the intricate, and the unprintable. The last, though transmitted verbally, are by no means the least popular, and hundreds of them have weathered the long years by word of mouth. But it is, perforce, with the other two that we are concerned.

It may surprise you to know that the most popular English verse form is the limerick, which has been and still is being composed by all kinds of people, from the most erudite writers to the humblest schoolboy scribbling on the flyleaf of his textbook, or the busy housewife who snatches a moment to sit down and enter a soap contest. Sonnets, heroic couplets, triolets, and the other complicated but intriguing French forms, ballads, blank verse, and free verse all fall short of the popularity of the limerick with the writing public. Frowned on by academic purists, belittled by hyperliterary poets, often ignored by anthologists, and adored by the public, the limerick has been used—and abused—ever since that odd ornithologist and landscape painter, Edward Lear, set the fashion with such irresponsible lines as:

There was an old man who said, "Hush!
I perceive a young bird in the bush."
When they said, "Is it small?"
He replied, "Not at all.
It is four times as big as the bush!"

The origins of the form are dim; the name itself is a mystery. Even the encyclopedias are puzzled. The favorite theory is that the limerick derived its name from a song about the Irish town, each stanza of which ended, "Will you come up to Limerick?" But although several examples of the form existed before 1830, it was not until Edward Lear wrote his verses composed of moonshine and magic that the limerick acquired a name and fame. Almost immediately after publication of Lear's *Book of Nonsense* the brisk little stanza caught the imagination of writers. It was imitated, varied, burlesqued. Countless newspaper competitions were instituted; people who never had written poetry, or had not bothered to read it, supplied countless missing last lines, until today more than a million limericks have come into existence.

What sort of people have succumbed to the lure of the limerick? All sorts. Practically everyone has tried his hand at the construction of these mocking verses, some of them political in purpose, some critical, but most merely madcap. Great poets have vied with multitudes of the unknown to sharpen the point of their five-line absurdities. Rudyard Kipling wrote:

There once was a boy in Quebec
Who was buried in snow to his neck.
When asked, "Are you friz?"
He replied, "Yes, I is.
But we don't call this cold in Quebec."

Robert Louis Stevenson extended the geographic range—most limericks insist on taking place in a definite locality—and added this stanza, which cannot be found in *A Child's Garden of Verses*:

There was an old man of the Cape,
Who made himself garments of crêpe.
When asked, "Do they tear?"
He replied, "Here and there;
But they're perfectly splendid for shape."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, that irrepressible punster, took a person rather than a place for his subject, and the result was one of the most often quoted of all limericks:

The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher
Called a hen a most elegant creature.
The hen, pleased with that,
Laid an egg in his hat—
And thus did the hen reward Beecher.

Langford Reed, compiler of *The Complete Limerick Book*, also favors puns. Returning to place names for his rhyme, Reed created a limerick that has been collected continually (and misquoted) without credit:

An indolent vicar of Bray
His roses allowed to decay.
His wife, more alert,
Bought a powerful squirt
And said to her spouse, "Let us spray."

Another that has gone round the world usually is credited to that famous author Anonymous. Every true fancier of limericks (limeratomist?) knows it was written by a witty Englishman, Cosmo Monkhouse:

There was a young lady of Niger,
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside—
And the smile on the face of the tiger!

So great is the appeal that when people cannot make up limericks, they appropriate them. Woodrow Wilson was so fond of a particular modest limerick that he was thought to have written it. Even Langford Reed credited the President with the authorship of the following self-deprecating stanza, actually written by a forgotten poet named Anthony Euwer:

As a beauty I'm not a great star;
Others are handsomer far;
But my face—I don't mind it,
Because I'm behind it;
It's the folks out in front that I jar!

Perhaps the simplest, and still the most famous of all limericks are those of Edward Lear, who immortalized, if he did not invent, the form. Written more than a hundred years ago to entertain the grandchildren of his patron, the Earl of Derby, they are models of direct and superb nonsense. The Lear formula was simplicity itself: a five-line stanza with the third and fourth lines one foot shorter than the other three. Built on two rhymes, Lear's limericks usually repeat one of the rhyme words in the concluding line. For example, these well-known stanzas:

There was an old man with a beard,
 Who said, "It is just as I feared.
 Two owls and a hen,
 Four larks and a wren,
 Have *all* built their nests in my beard!"

There was a young lady whose chin
 Resembled the point of a pin:
 So she had it made sharp
 And purchased a harp,
 And played several tunes with her chin.

There was an old man in a tree,
 Who was horribly bored by a bee.
 When they said, "Does it buzz?"
 He replied, "Yes, it does!
 It's a regular brute of a bee."

Anybody could do it. Everybody did. But the formula lacked something; the repetitions began to cloy; the unvaried last rhyme came with wearisome regularity.

In one of his more wicked moments, W. S. Gilbert (without the aid of Sullivan) burlesqued Lear's limericks, especially the one about the man who was "bored" by a bee. Gilbert wrote a limerick that didn't have *any* rhymes at all! To wit:

There was an old man of St. Bees.
 Who was stung in the arm by a Wasp.
 When asked, "Does it hurt?"

He replied, "No, it doesn't;
I'm so glad that it wasn't a Hornet."

But most of the limerick-makers were not so radical. They wanted to preserve the sound as well as the sense; yet they were not satisfied with Lear's model. They soon found what was missing: a last line that would come like a climax, a surprise, a comic whiplash. So they began fashioning new, sprightly variations on the old pattern. They designed intricate and seemingly impossible situations—and then brought them to a blithely nonchalant conclusion. They rollicked in ridiculous rhymes. They turned Lear's little limerick inside out, upside down, and helter-skelter. Here are a few of the more famous of this new type:

There was a young man who was bitten
By twenty-two cats and a kitten.
Cried he, "It is clear
My end is quite near.
No matter! I'll die like a Briton!"

There once was a pious young priest,
Who lived almost wholly on yeast;
"For," he said, "it is plain
We must all rise again,
And I want to get started at least."

There was an old man from Peru,
Who dreamt he was eating his shoe.
He awoke in the night
In a terrible fright—
And found it was perfectly true!

A collegiate damsel named Breeze,
Weighed down by B. A.'s and Litt. D.'s,
Collapsed from the strain.
Alas, it was plain
She was killing herself by degrees.

There was a young lady named Banker,
Who slept while her ship lay at anchor.
She awoke in dismay
When she heard the mate say,
"Hi! Hoist up the top-sheet and spanker!"

There's a notable family named Stein:
There's Gertrude, there's Ep, and there's Ein.
Gert's prose is the bunk;
Ep's sculpture is junk;
And no one can understand Ein!

There was a young wife from Antigua,
Who remarked to her spouse, "What a pigual!"
He retorted, "My queen,
Is it manners you mean?
Or do you refer to my figua?"

A daring young lady of Guam
Observed, "The Pacific's so calm
I'll swim out for a lark."
She met a large shark. . . .
Let us now sing the Ninetieth Psalm.

The bottle of perfume that Willie sent
Was highly displeasing to Millicent;
Her thanks were so cold
They quarreled, I'm told,
Through that silly scent Willie sent Millicent.

The last example suggested a new variation: limericks that were tricks of pronunciation and spelling, triumphs of double meaning and the ultimate twist. The late Carolyn Wells excelled in such accomplished word-scrambling and tongue-twisting as:

A canner exceedingly canny
One morning remarked to his granny:
"A canner can can

Anything that he can,
But a canner can't can a can, can he?"

There was a young fellow named Tate
Who dined with his girl at 8:08
But I'd hate to relate
What that fellow named Tate
And his tête-à-tête ate at 8:08

A certain young chap named Bill Beebee
Was in love with a lady named Phoebe.
"But," said he, "I must see
What the clerical fee
Be before Phoebe be Phoebe B. Beebee."

The inconsistencies in English pronunciation were seized upon and exploited to the point of confusion. The limerick became more and more freakish. Here are several samples of the more perverse and precious puzzlers of this kind:

A girl who weighed many an oz.
Used language I dare not pronoz.
For a fellow unkind
Pulled her chair out behind
Just to see (so he said) if she'd boz.

An unpopular youth of Cologne
With a pain in his stomach did mogne.
He heaved a great sigh
And said, "I would digh,
But the loss would be only my ogne."

There was a young lady from Wooster
Who ussessed to crow like a rooster.
She ussessed to climb
Seven trees at a time—
But her sisister ussessed to booster.

She frowned and called him Mr.
 Because in sport he kr.
 And so in spite
 That very nite
 This Mr. kr. sr.

But later tendencies indicate a departure from tricks and a return to the simple and straightforward norm. Recently the Mark Twain Society instituted a nationwide contest for the best limerick on its patron saint, and more than three thousand candidates were submitted. The prize (awarded to Mrs. W. S. Burgess of Fullerton, Nebraska) was an orthodox limerick, completely traditional, even to the final old-fashioned pun:

Mark Twain was a mop-headed male,
 Whose narratives sparkle like ale;
 And this Prince of the Grin
 Who once fathered Huck Finn
 Can still hold the world by the tale!

In an effort to establish a difference in humor between American and British readers, H. J. Eysenck, the noted psychologist, reported his conclusions in *Character and Personality*. Among a group of limericks, the Americans chose this as the funniest:

There was a young man of Laconia,
 Whose mother-in-law had pneumonia.
 He hoped for the worst—
 And after March first
 They buried her 'neath a begonia.

The British preferred the following:

There was a young girl of Asturias,
 Whose temper was frantic and furious.
 She used to throw eggs
 At her grandmother's legs—
 A habit unpleasant, but curious.

Such choices may not be conclusive. But they prove that, though tastes change and temperaments differ, the limerick is still a test of humor, a favorite medium for millions, and an international lure.

DAY KEENE

Remember the Night

MAX ENGLES was a tough, smart cop. He knew all the angles. It said so in the newspaper. That is, he had been a smart cop until too little salary, too many fifths of free whiskey, and a red-haired woman from St. Louis with a yen for a diamond ring had turned him into a portrait of the north end of a horse headed south.

There was even an old picture of the guy, a big black-haired Irishman, weighing perhaps two hundred and twenty pounds. I showed the picture to the barman.

"Who's this guy Engles?" I asked. "And what's all the fuss about? It says here he was bounced off the force eight years ago. Why the big write-up now?"

He was a slimy little punk with a good opinion of himself. He'd also been out at the carnival lot the night before and it pleased him to rub it in. "Not so smart, are you, Carney? That's one time you slipped up." He quoted the banner in front of my pitch: "*The Great Mysto. Knows all. Sees all. Tells all. Reveals both the past and the future.*"

There were four other men in the bar, a working stiff and three well-dressed lads who looked like hoods. The barmen let them in on the joke. "Them Carneys is all alike. Fakers. This old gray-haired Joe works for the Greater Worthan Shows, claims he can read the past and the future. So he has to ask about Engles!" He

grinned at me. "You're so good, Mysto, why don't you grab a shovel and go dig up the two hundred grand?"

I pretended to look him over carefully. "Engles is just a name to me. But take you, for example. I could tell you a lot about yourself."

He hooted. "I betcha."

I slapped a ten on the bar. "A bet." I nodded at the well-dressed lads. "And I'll let these gentlemen judge."

He covered my money, grinning. "Okay, Carney. Where was I born?"

I put the tips of my fingers to my forehead, closed my eyes, and concentrated. "In Aleppo, Syria. You came to this country with your family when you were four and moved here to Morgantown when you were fifteen. You live at One-three-two-six Forty-third Street South. You've been tending bar here for three months. You get sixty-two fifty a week and what you can steal. Last week you made a play for a big blonde named Mabel in the Hotel Gordon Grill but tried to make time too fast and got your face slapped. You bank at the Second National. Your passbook number is six-four-three-two-eight-one-five. And you have four hundred and twenty dollars and fifty-six cents on deposit."

I shook myself out of the trance and looked at him. His cheeks were beaded with sweat as he gaped at me.

"That enough?" I asked. "Or do you want more? I skipped over some things, like that hot-car rap, for example, your dishonorable discharge from the Army, and that black-haired little married waitress who—"

"Shut up," he managed finally, red in the face. "For God's sake, shut up!"

I looked at one of the well-dressed lads. "My money?"

He said, "So it would seem." He asked the barman, "That was straight stuff he was giving you?"

The barman still wasn't convinced. "He couldn't know all that. I never told no one I was Syrian, or where I was born, or how old I was when I come to this country."

It was my time to crow. "I'm the Great Mysto. Remember? The past, the present and the future are an open book to me."

The well-dressed lad asked the barman if he had his bank-book. He laid it on the bar. Both the number on the book and the amount of deposit checked with the figures I'd given. Shaking his head, the lad said, "I'd say the ten is yours." He was no longer unimpressed. "But tell me—how do you do it?"

I said truthfully, "I don't do it with mirrors."

Putting the ten in my wallet, I picked the newspaper off the bar and limped out of the place.

There was a nip in the air, but that far south it doesn't really get cold. I was comfortable wearing a suit coat. From what I had seen of it, Morgantown looked like it would be a good stand. A town of around one hundred thousand population, its streets were comfortably filled with shoppers. Stores and the bars and the movie houses and the March of Dimes layout on the corner of Broad Street and First Avenue were doing a fair business.

I laid a dime on the board and asked the guy at the mike for the name of a good place to eat. He thanked me for the drive and recommended Daly's. I read more about Max Engles as I ate. It was quite a story. Engles, it seemed, had been a lieutenant on the local vice squad, vice in Morgantown being a general term embracing everything from gambling and the illicit handling of liquor to its more accepted definition. He had also been the man who carried the little black bag into which the bad boys and girls dropped their weekly donations if they wanted to stay in business. The funny part of it was, according to the story in the paper, even Engles' worst enemies admitted he had been an honest cop, living on his small salary, never taking a dime for himself—until he had fallen in love with and married a red-haired night-club entertainer from St. Louis.

The reporter who wrote the story used that theme throughout. "*St. Louis woman wid her diamon' rings, . . . pulls dat man roun' by her apron strings.*"*

A child, a girl whom they had named Ailine, had been born to them. And that had been the beginning-of-the-end department. Suddenly imbued with the preposterous idea that the wife and child of a lieutenant of detectives ought to live on a scale commen-

* Used by permission of Handy Bros. Music Co., Inc.

surate with the molls of the racketeers from whom he was collecting tribute, and the over-fed wives and mistresses of the crooked police department heads and city officials to whom he was turning it over, Engles had blown his top and started to dip into the little black bag.

It couldn't last. It didn't. The more he stole the more he had to steal to chink up the cracks in the cages to keep the tigers in the City Hall from realizing the amount of red meat he was snatching from under their noses.

The end came when Engles' kid got sick. The doctors diagnosed it as this and that. By the time it developed it was polio and Ailine was desperately in need of an iron lung—and there wasn't one in Morgantown—Lieutenant Engles, for all he had stolen, was too broke to have one flown in. He had appealed to his superiors, but since they were suspicious of him now, the crowd in the City Hall had turned him down.

Now came the crux of the story. Desperate, he had got roaring drunk and gone on an unscheduled collection. The town had never known such a shakedown. It was, put it in the pot—or else.

The newspaper estimated that in his twelve-hour tour of the gambling joints, gin mills, bookies, and call-houses with something to hide, Lieutenant Engles had collected in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand dollars.

The waiter brought me a fresh cup of coffee. "I see now," I told him, "what the town is talking about."

He looked over my shoulder at the paper. "Oh, you mean that Engles affair. Yeah. The paper prints that every year. Kind of a moral lesson like, I guess. You know—it don't pay to steal. And how your dime may make an iron lung available to some kid that needs one."

I read on and saw why the barman had said if I was as good as I claimed to be I'd go buy myself a shovel.

The money hadn't done Ailine any good. She died sometime during Engles' tour. And somehow he'd heard of it. When they caught up with him he was crying, fighting drunk, but he hadn't the money and refused to say what he'd done with it.

The paper said he'd been called on the carpet, severely reprimanded.

manded, then dismissed from the force. Knowing a little about how crooked police departments operate, I knew he'd also had the hell beat out of him, trying to make him tell where the money was.

There was more, but I didn't bother to read it. I folded the paper and drank my coffee. "What happened to Engles?"

The waiter shook his head. "No one seems to know. Him and his wife left town and ain't been heard from since. Although I did meet a marine in a bar one night who claimed to have seen a guy who looked like Engles with a Seabee outfit in the South Pacific. But you know how it was. Before he could make sure, his outfit was moved on."

"And the money was never found?" I said.

"Not a cent."

I suggested maybe Engles and his wife had taken the money with them, and the waiter laughed in my face.

"That just shows you don't know this town, mister. I bet the wolves that run it stripped both of them to the hide and went over 'em with a vacuum cleaner and a Geiger counter before they even let 'em get past the first traffic light."

I asked if he meant to tell me the same gang Engles had collected for were still in office.

He was apologetic. "You know how the voters are, mister. When something bad breaks in the paper they get all excited and hold mass meetings and reform rallies. But it never lasts. And that was eight years ago. As long as the millage isn't raised, Uncle John is put on home relief, and someone quashes parking tickets, they don't really care who's in City Hall."

When I got back to the lot, Lou was drinking coffee in the trailer, her freshly bleached hair in little fat curls all over her head, her face smeared with muscle cream. She asked how the town looked.

I tossed her the paper. "Wide open, baby. A lot of chatter about two hundred grand lying around loose, finders-keepers."

I looked at her for a long time. "Lou," I said, "how would you like to throw this pitch out the window? Maybe head down Flor-

ida way and do nothing the rest of our lives but lie on the sand and listen to the waves?"

She wasn't too enthused. "That would take money, wouldn't it?"

Ignoring the front page of the paper and the story about Max Engles, she found the crossword puzzle and started penciling it in.

It was going to rain, and hard. I could tell it by my leg. The afternoon had been a strain. I started to say something nasty, to touch off some reaction in her, then decided it was best to forget it.

Without looking up from the puzzle, she said, "The cards are in the pocket of your dress coat."

I skimmed through them while I dressed because I couldn't take them with me. Except for names and dates and places they all contained almost identical data. Given a taking-off point, I could almost do without them.

Tying my white tie, I studied my face in the mirror. The Great Mysto was getting old. It was small wonder Lou no longer enthused over my coming or going. It was small wonder the punk in the bar had called me an old gray-haired Joe. I was. My hair was a dirty white, and thinning. My wisp of a waxed mustache was ludicrous. I had lines in my face deep enough to lay a lead pencil in. My shoulders were thin and stooped. My one hundred and thirty-five pounds was mostly sallow skin and bones and nerves.

I poured myself a stiff drink, then stooped to kiss Lou goodbye. She turned away. "Be careful of your coat. My face is greasy."

I asked if she wasn't going to wish me luck.

"You," she said, "are the mind reader."

I let it go at that and walked over to the tent. I'd been right about Morgantown. It was a good stand. Business was even better than it had been the night before. None of the special pigeons showed up to be plucked, but the run-of-the-midway were satisfied to be told, at two bucks the telling, the usual things they want to hear.

I'd just finished a special five-dollar reading, when the well-dressed lad I had met in the bar came in.

"Okay. Let's go, Mysto," he told me. "There's a guy in town who wants to talk to you."

I said I was highly flattered, but with four clients waiting I hadn't time at the moment to give an off-of-the-midway reading.

He showed me the butt of the gun in the holster under his arm. "That's up to you, fellow. My orders are to bring you in. I intend to. But I'd rather not get rough about it." He laid a C-note on the table. "Look. My name is Jimmy Conley. I'm only a working stiff—I take orders. Come see the guy and the C-note is yours for the favor. If you two can do business you'll get nine more like the one on the table. If it's no dice I'll drive you back and you keep the C-note for your trouble."

"And if I don't?"

"I'll have to get rough."

I picked the bill from the table and my hat from the couch. "In that case, let's go, my friend. Believe me, Mr. Conley, your argument is irresistible."

Conley only looked like a hood. He wasn't. He was, it developed, a captain of detectives, and from what I gleaned during the short ride he was currently toting the little black bag that Max Engles had once carried.

Going up in the elevator at Central Bureau, I asked, "You're sure this isn't a pinch? I bought my reader." And I showed him my license to tell fortunes in Morgantown.

"No. It isn't a pinch," he assured me.

Pushing open a door on the fourth floor he led me through an anteroom into a large office. A fat man sitting back of a desk looked me over and didn't seem to think much of what he saw.

"So you're the Great Mysto. You're the man who knows all, sees all, tells all. All right. Tell me who I am."

I said, "You're Chief of Police Sam Shalley."

"And how did you know that?"

"Your name is on the door."

A tall, dark man was sitting with one haunch on the desk. He said, "A clown. A wise Carney. Okay, tell me who I am."

"That," I admitted, "comes harder." I concentrated for a few

seconds. "But the name McElroy comes to me. And the name is followed by the fourth and the first letter of the alphabet."

Shalley was impressed.

The D.A. was amused. "Sure he knows who we are. All Carneys take particular care to identify the fuzz. Most of them have a dame out in front of their pitch. She blows into town three or four days before the show comes in." He explained it as though to a child. "It's her job to pick up pigeons. She learns all she can about them. Then when Mysto here hits town the stupes are so amazed by the facts he knows about them they not only are willing to pay anything he asks to learn their future, they give him a thousand dollars' worth of free advertising. . . . Isn't that the way you work it, fellow?"

I said, "You're telling the story."

Police Chief Shalley seemed disappointed.

I turned to Conley. "Okay, chum. It looks like I get a free ride back to the lot. That was the agreement, wasn't it? It looks like the boys have changed their minds about wanting me to help locate the money Engles stashed away."

"How did you know that?" Shalley gasped.

He looked at Conley. Conley shook his head. "I didn't tell him a thing."

"How *did* you know?" the D.A. asked.

I snapped, "I'm the Great Mysto. Remember? I reveal both the past and future. And it would seem you *do* have a confidential problem." I put on my hat. "Well, nice to have met you gentlemen. I'll probably see you in jail sometime."

I started for the door and Shalley told Conley to stop me. His fat face was as red as a spanked baby's fanny. "Just one minute, Mysto. You heard the D.A. *How did you know what I had in mind?* Talk or I'll slap you in the lock-up and throw away the key."

He could do it.

"The story about Engles is all over the front page of the evening paper," I told him. "It says he must have collected close to two hundred thousand dollars, but there's nothing in the story

to indicate the money was ever recovered. Ergo, it's still to be found."

Shalley asked McElroy what ergo meant.

"What's your right name, Mysto?" McElroy asked.

Captain Conley answered before I could. "He gave it as Beemis on his reader, Joe Beemis."

"Frisk him, Captain," McElroy ordered. "Check the name against his driver's license and any other identification in his wallet."

I handed Conley my wallet. He went through it and reported that the name on the miniature copy of my Seabee discharge and all my other papers checked with the name on my reader.

Shalley laughed until his corporation bobbed. "What did you do in the Seabees, Mysto?"

"It wasn't reading minds."

"How about a record?" McElroy asked. "Have you a record, Mysto?" McElroy was the smartest cookie of the three and he had a pot cooking on his own back burner. It was it in his eyes.

I told the truth. "A few misdemeanor raps in towns where the fuzz refused to stay paid. Nothing on the big book."

He rolled an unlighted cigar between his lips for a long time before he spoke again. Then, looking at Conley, he said, "That will be all for you, Captain. I think the chief and I can handle this from now on."

Conley shrugged and left the office.

When he had gone, McElroy returned his attention to me. "How about it, Mysto? Think you can help us locate that money?"

I played it for what it was worth. "I haven't the least idea. But even if I knew I could, I wouldn't do it for a grand. It wouldn't be worth my trouble. That's only one half of one per cent of two hundred thousand dollars."

He waved my objection aside. "We won't quibble. Locate the money and you can name your fee."

Shalley shook his head. "But you said he was a fake."

The D.A. smiled indulgently. "I have been wrong. And you heard what Conley said. Mysto told the attendant in the Glass Bar things the barman swore he had never told anyone."

"That was different," I pointed out. "The barman was there. I could read his mind. Where is this Engles now? How do I get to him?"

"That," McElroy said, "is your problem. We aren't interested in Engles. What we want is the money. And unless—which I doubt very much—he slipped back into town sometime during the past eight years and recovered it, it's still buried here somewhere. He was covered with mud when we picked him up. Mud. Concentrate on mud."

I said, "Okay. But mud is mud. Give me some other, more personal, point of departure. How about this red-haired woman mentioned in the paper?"

"We don't know where she is, either."

I thought a moment. Then I asked Shalley if he had anything that Engles had ever handled.

He said, "Hell, no," then corrected himself. "Say! I might at that." He took a box from the bottom drawer of his desk, sorted through the junk in it, and tossed a silver shield on the blotter. "There. That was Max's buzzer. Will that help you any?"

I played it cagey. "It might."

Both of them watching me, I limped over to the couch and sat on the edge of the circle of light formed by the lamp on Shalley's desk. Then, cupping the shield in my left hand, I closed my eyes and pressed the tips of the fingers of my right hand to my forehead.

It's funny the things you can see when you close your eyes and think hard. The shield came alive in my hand. I could see Max Engles distinctly—big, burly, loud-mouthed, ignorant, black-haired and barrel-chested, as he was in the newspaper picture on the day he had first got his shield.

Then the picture of Engles began to change. There were lines in his face. He was older, not so cocky. He'd been given the little black bag and he didn't quite know what to do about it. What he was doing was wrong. He knew it. But an order was an order and he couldn't lose his new commission.

Mud. Mud. Concentrate on mud.

The pictures began to run in slightly faster sequence, like those

thrown by an old-fashioned motion picture projector that was getting out of hand.

I could hear music, laughter. A singing woman jerked across the screen. A young woman, red-haired, smiling, offering her lips to Engles. Then I saw his fingers dip into the little black bag and the shield in my hand turned hot.

The sequence of scenes ran still faster. The screen was streaked with rain. A child cried fitfully, stopped. A woman screamed. Then still big, still burly, roaring drunk, Engles took up all of the screen staggering swiftly through the rain and night, carrying the little black bag.

The tempo increased to the heat and madness of fever. The child was no longer crying but Engles was. Now he was kneeling in the mud in prayer. Now he was back on his feet shaking his fists at the sky. Now, hidden by a high board fence and the night, a shy, drunken smile on his lips while tears washed the rain from his cheeks, he was digging, faster, faster, faster . . .

The speeding film broke. The screen flooded with light. I tried to stand up and my knees gave way, pitching me onto my face. Both Shalley and McElroy let me lay.

When I could, I got to my feet.

"Quite a performance," the D.A. said.

Shalley licked his thick lips. "Well?"

I asked, "Is there a ball park in town? Surrounded by a high board fence covered with advertising?"

McElroy slapped his thigh. "The old ball park—of course! The boys picked up Max two blocks from there. But there's no ball park now—"

"They've got the memorial there," Shalley said. "The names of all the guys who went into service. On the big white billboard."

"The league franchise wasn't picked up, so they tore down the ball park and made a public park out of the area," McElroy said. "They put up this memorial board and installed those big lights." He snapped his fingers. "As far as I know the lights that illuminate the memorial have never been turned off since. *That's why Max couldn't go back and dig up the money!*"

He turned to me. "Did it come to you just where Max buried the dough? Or do we dig up the park?"

I shook my head. "Not if you remember where home plate was. I can work from there."

He smiled. "Not from here?"

"I'd have to be there. The next point of departure."

The D.A. considered a moment. Then he picked up the phone on the Chief's desk, called the City Power Plant, and asked to speak to the engineer in charge. His call completed, he told Shalley to get some of the city police maps—both old and new—out of the plat file. He studied them carefully, then said, "Okay. Let's go dig."

It was raining lightly when we left Central Bureau. There weren't too many people on the street, but a flat-bed covered truck was backed up to the March of Dimes layout and a sister team was going to town with "Riders in the Sky" while the guy handling the sidewalk mike beat the drum.

We rode in McElroy's car. Shalley had been enthused in the office. Most of it waned by the time we neared the park. He rode in the back seat muttering to himself. Once I heard him say, "What the hell? How could a guy just sit there holding a buzzer in his hand and figure out where two hundred grand is buried?"

You could see the lights of the memorial eight blocks away. The D.A. drove around the park, estimating the number of people. Most of the town was at the carnival, I guess. Finally we parked and sat there in the car.

Shalley asked, "Now what do we do?"

The D.A. said, "Wait. Until the lights are turned off we're in the same predicament poor Max Engles has been in for eight years. If Rolph Welch, or any of the boys who put up that money, knew we were on the trail . . ."

For some reason he began to sweat. He wiped his face with his pocket handkerchief. Then taking a pint bottle from the glove compartment of the car he took a stiff drink and passed the bottle to Shalley.

While he was drinking the lights went out. Not only the park lights but the street and house lights as well.

"We have," McElroy announced, "about half an hour."

He got a shovel from the back of the car and led the way across the street and into the park. We could hear young voices wondering what had happened, and other young voices that were happy about the whole thing. We went past the tall billboard, and I had a vagrant thought about the names on the small, white plaques.

"Okay, Mysto," McElroy grunted. I heard the rustle of paper as he studied the maps beneath the thin beam of the flashlight he'd brought from the car. He stood on a piece of lawn about fifteen yards from the memorial and said, "This is it. Home plate was here."

There wasn't time or light enough for any acting. I oriented myself, then took six steps toward where the netting had been. "Dig here."

He handed me the shovel. "No, you dig. I wouldn't deprive you of the privilege." As I dug he kept up a steady stream of low-pitched conversation. "You must have been wounded in the Seabees, eh, Mysto?"

I said I'd lost part of a leg.

He sympathized, "And a lot of weight, too, I'll bet you. I managed to stay out of it myself. But I know how it must have been. It aged a lot of men before their time. Yes. There's nothing like war to turn a man's hair white and carve new lines in his face. You know, they say some men came back so changed even their old friends were hard put to recognize them."

I stopped digging.

He dug his gun into my spine. "Keep right on digging. You're doing fine."

It was all over Police Chief Shalley's head. He wanted to know what McElroy was getting at.

The D.A. told him, simply. "Money."

My shovel blade grated on metal. I scooped the loose dirt away and lifted out a five-gallon can. It felt like it was rusted in places but I couldn't feel any holes that went through. I started to pry

off the top and McElroy hit me a vicious swipe across the face with his gun.

"No. Let the chief do that, Mysto."

I lay where the blow had knocked me, spitting blood, and hating him. Then I heard a squeak of metal and Shalley babbled, "The guy isn't a fake. It's here. Max's bag is in the can."

McElroy shushed him, "Not so loud, you fat fool!"

But he was almost as excited as Shalley. Neither of them saw nor heard the deeper blob of moving night move across the lawn until the other man was almost on them.

"That's nice," the newcomer admired. "If I were you boys, I'd freeze in that position. On you, it looks good."

McElroy's voice was strained. He sounded as though his throat hurt him. "What are you doing here, Rolph?"

The other man told him. "Me? I'm following a tip. Some Carney who called himself The Great Mysto phoned me just before it got dark and said he had a psychic message that if I were to show up at the old ball park tonight and all the lights in the city went out, he wouldn't be at all surprised if I found two guys digging up Engles' little black bag. It kinda intrigued me. And what do you know, he was right."

It was too dark to see much but he must have held out his free hand. "All right, McElroy. Hand it over."

McElroy stalled. "Now, wait, Rolph. We've been played for chumps. We—"

"How?" the racketeer asked. "This guy Mysto gave me a good tip." He grew impatient. "Come on. You can unfreeze enough to hand over that bag. I put up a lot of that dough in the first place."

Shalley lost his head. "No," he bleated. "Don't give it to him! Half of that money is mine. Shoot the dirty crook, Mac! We can square it."

And that was it.

McElroy screamed, "Shut up, you fool!" Too late.

Turning on my left side so my body hid the flash I'd slipped out my belly gun and fired two shots into the mud.

They were followed by a third, a fourth, and then a fifth shot.

His fingers laced over his belly, Rolph squatted as though he was doing a knee bend. But once down on his haunches he stayed there until he toppled over on his side.

McElroy was a tall man. He swayed like a flag pole in a high wind. With a tremendous effort of will he lifted the gun that had killed Rolph and leveled it at me. Before he could pull the trigger, it sagged. A moment later it thudded to the mud and he followed it to lie across the knees of the man who had killed him.

I slipped my gun back in my belt, got to my feet, and picked up the bag.

Shalley snatched at it, bleating. "No, you don't. You're under arrest."

I asked, "For what? I didn't shoot anyone." I was suddenly sick of the whole affair. "Now let go of the bag, fat boy, or I *will* stick around. And I'll tell the Grand Jury about a kid named Jenny. Remember the one the wagon boys carried out after that night party in an apartment over on B Street?"

He deflated like a punctured tire.

"What do you know about that?"

"Are you surprised," I told him. "I'm the Great Mysto. Remember?"

He still didn't get the score but he let go of the bag. The shots had been heard and reported. Men were shouting now along the street. In the distance I could hear the first rain-muted wail of a prowler car.

I walked through the rain to LeMoyne, and down LeMoyne three blocks to the car that I'd parked there shortly after I'd baited my trap in the Glass Bar. A trench coat covered my muddy tails. Conley might do a lot of thinking but it wouldn't get the kid anywhere. I was clean. No one could prove a damn thing.

All I had to do was drive on back to the lot and pick up Lou and the trailer. The Great Mysto had made his last pitch. Yet instead of moving on I sat there looking at the bag. It was eight years older and covered with mould. But it hadn't changed. It still was only money. I closed my eyes for a moment. And once more it was funny the things a guy can see when he closes his eyes and thinks hard.

The rain had let up a little but there was no one on the Midway and all of the joints had shut down for the night. I walked on into the trailer. Lou had dressed, but she was still working a crossword puzzle.

She looked up. "Well?"

"I had it. I had it right in my hand."

"What do you mean you *had* it?"

"Just that. Florida is out. We move on with the show," I told her.

She noticed the dried blood on my face for the first time. "You mean you had it and you let that gang of thieves take it away from you?"

I took off the trench coat and hung it on a hook. My evening clothes were a mess. I'd have to have them cleaned, maybe even buy a new set of tails, before I could make a pitch. "No. No one took it away from me. McElroy is dead. So is Rolph. And I'm in the clear. I had the damn bag in the car with me but I had to pass First and Broad to get here." She'd been down town that afternoon. I hoped she'd understand a little. "And there was a young guy out there in the rain beating the drum for dimes while a couple of kids about as old as Ailine would have been, shilled for his pitch. And, well, like I say, it was raining. And business was bad. So—" I tried to go on, and couldn't. I reached for the bottle.

Lou took it from me. "No. Please."

I wondered why I'd thought her eyes were hard. They weren't. They were blue and soft and swimming with tears. Then I realized it had been years since I had seen her cry.

She said, "So you laid the little black bag on the line."

I nodded. "Yeah."

Her being as close as she was I could see the red roots of the hairs the bleach had missed. I was almost afraid to ask. "Okay, sweetheart?"

"Okay, sweetheart?" she asked me. Her eyes were shining through the tears now. "You ask *me* if that's okay? I think that's just swell, Max."

She kissed me, hard. And suddenly neither of us were old, and all the wasted years had dropped away and things were as they once had been and life wasn't over at all. It was just beginning for both of us.

Lou buried her face on my chest. "I'll bet the guy was surprised."

"I wouldn't know," I told her. "I didn't stick around."

WILLIAM J. LEDERER

The Skipper's Pink Panties

WHEN CAPTAIN BURKE received orders to China I pulled strings to go with him. No luck. The Bureau of Navigation said “—Ensign Lederer needs more seasoning before a tour in the Orient.”

The day Captain Burke left, we nearly cried. Especially as the *Fortune's* new skipper, Captain “Bullet Head” Poindexter, didn't measure up to the recent standard. A huge man with a small head and a high-pitched voice, he made it clear from the start that everything in the ship revolved about him.

As a shiphandler and a tactician, Captain Poindexter carried out his duties in a sound manner. In his human relations he fell into an error too common to military men: he believed because he was a military expert that, ipso facto, he also had a greater knowledge of philosophy, art, sex, philology, etc., than any person beneath him in rank.

Captain Poindexter enjoyed stating a theory at mealtime and then, with big words, ramming it down the throats of his, in his opinion, untutored junior officers. He usually memorized articles in the encyclopedia before coming to the wardroom.

When he learned that I was the ship's radical—that is, a believer in the New Deal—Captain Poindexter (an Old Guard Republican) addressed his mealtime discussions in my general direction. Before many months went by I violently disputed the Old Man's theories. Frankly, his mind operated slowly; and ruining his the-

ories was easy. Often I embarrassed him; the more I argued the more annoyed he became. It became a fad with me to foul up the captain's pompousness, and I used every sophistry and dirty trick in the book.

For example, once, after a lengthy wrangle, the Captain angrily concluded with his clincher argument. "Irregardless, Lederer, the fact remains that Americans are better farmers than Chinese. Max Store in his book, *The Orient in Rebellion*, clearly proves this."

"Captain," I said smugly, "I'm afraid there's no such word as irregardless. And as for Mr. Store, he never saw a Chinese farmer in his life. No one who knows *anything* about the Orient would accept a word—."

The Old Man exploded. "I'm sick and tired of your shyster arguments and sharp practices. Now listen to me. I don't want you ever to open your mouth in this wardroom again. Do you understand? That's an order! As long as I'm commanding officer, you keep your mouth shut. Shut tight."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Except," continued the Skipper, "if I tell a joke. And then, by God, you lean back in your chair and laugh and laugh and laugh."

We ensigns all agreed that I won that round.

I soon found out that actually I had lost it. Captain Poindexter wasn't kidding. The next day, when I made a remark at lunch, he ordered me to my room for two days for failing to carry out his orders. A week later he showed me the first draft of my fitness report.

"Although this young officer carries out his duties well," the report read, "he has an inclination to be uncooperative with the commanding officer. He has applied for duty in China. His commanding officer has recommended that this not be approved until Ensign Lederer acquires more social maturity. His perspective on respect due a senior officer is slightly warped."

The fitness report, if sent in, could easily ruin my career. Furthermore, upon thinking the thing over, I concluded that the

Captain had a lot of truth on his side. I decided to woo the guy scientifically.

I bought *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and read it carefully. It seemed that the way to gain back the Old Man's friendship was to ask him his advice on personal questions and, later, when the opportunity arose, let him beat me in a discussion.

Meanwhile, I got into a bit of trouble somewhere else. I told a young lady at a dance that her petticoat was showing; she, having a couple of drinks under her girdle, felt offended and slapped me. She told an admiral that I had been fresh with her. He reprimanded me.

Here, I thought, was the time to seek Captain Poindexter's counsel.

The next morning, at breakfast, I brought up the problem.

"Captain, sir, I'm in some personal trouble and would very much appreciate your advice on the matter."

There came a long silence, during which time I didn't know whether he'd send me to my room again for talking, or help me out.

"What's your trouble?" he said finally.

"Sir," I said, dropping my eyes and trying to look contrite, "last night I went to a dance. I noticed that one girl's petticoat hung down. I went up to her politely, trying to be helpful, and told—"

"Petticoat!" roared the skipper looking up from his pork chop and scrambled eggs. "Did I hear you say petticoat?"

"Yes, sir."

He put his hand to his head and opened his mouth as if he had seen a ghost. "Petticoat! You mean a slip, man, a slip! Women haven't worn petticoats for thirty years."

I said nothing.

"Do you know the difference between a petticoat and a slip?"

"No, sir."

"Good heavens! Can there be an officer on my ship as dumb as that?" The captain warmed to his subject.

"Do you know what a redingote is?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"What's a dirndl?"

"I don't know, sir."

"A jabot?"

"I don't know, sir."

"An officer on my ship!" moaned the captain. "Is it possible?"

The Old Man waved for Abe to bring him another pork chop. While waiting for it, he continued working me over.

"Mr. Lederer, are you familiar with Article 912, U.S. Navy Regulations?"

"No, sir. But I'll look it up."

"Don't bother. I'll tell you—it says that I, as your commanding officer, am responsible for your professional training. And, by gad, mister, I'm going to see that the Regulations are carried out."

"I appreciate it, sir."

He continued. "No one's going to say I neglected my duty. Being a good officer is more than conning a ship and shooting the guns. It also embraces knowing your way around in society."

The skipper's pork chop arrived.

"It's evident to me," said the Old Man, "that you haven't had much experience with women. A petticoat!"

"I'll admit I'm pretty shy, sir."

"Shy! You just haven't been around. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six, sir."

"And you don't know a blessed thing about undergarments. Lederer—"

"No, sir. I'm pretty ignorant on that subject—."

"I want you to go out with a woman over this week-end," Captain Poindexter chuckled. His chuckle turned into a belly laugh.

"Oh ho! What a situation. Ho, ohhh, ho!"

"Aye, aye, sir," I said, smiling.

"Mister, this is no joking matter. I'm ordering you to take a woman out this week-end."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And bring back a hunk of her underwear to prove it. Bring back her step-ins. You know what step-ins are, I hope."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, Mister. Go ashore in the first liberty boat and carry out your orders. Good hunting, son," he said, running into another belly laugh.

That afternoon, after going ashore, I looked up a married classmate and explained the problem. His wife bought a cheap pair of pink step-ins for me. I sprinkled some sand on them, wrapped them up in a damp towel, and threw the bundle in the back of my car. I would bring the panties out to the ship on Monday.

However, the next evening, Sunday, I turned the matter over in my mind and decided that it wouldn't be dignified showing the underclothes on the ship in front of my shipmates. I telephoned the Captain's home to ask him if I could bring my trophy to his house.

Mrs. Poindexter answered.

"No, Mr. Lederer, the Captain isn't home. He went fishing over the week-end. Can I take a message?"

"No, ma'am, it's nothing important, thank you."

It occurred to me that the Captain might appreciate my being nice to his wife, so I invited her to come to the open-air movies with me at the Strand, a couple of miles down the beach from Coronado. She accepted. We saw the late showing of *The Baroness and the Butler* and I left her at her home about 11 P.M.

"When you see the Captain tonight, Mrs. Poindexter," I said as I left her porch, "please tell him I got what he ordered. He'll know what I mean."

"He won't be back this evening. He won't be back until the morning and he's going straight out to the ship."

Leaving the Captain's home, I went to the club and turned in, returning to the *Fortune* at 0745 the next morning, clutching the towel with my precious panties wrapped in it.

The officer of the deck stopped me as I reached the main deck.

"The Old Man left word to send you below pronto. He's got a mob down there."

"A mob?"

"Yeh, looks like the skippers and execs from every ship in the squadron came over to inspect your loot. The Old Man's putting

was on the spot, too. He's told them the whole story about ordering you to go out with a gal and bring back her pants. Now you better hurry; it's only ten minutes until quarters."

"He's done me dirt," I muttered on my way to the wardroom.

The officer of the deck hadn't exaggerated. The place was so jammed with senior officers that I couldn't get beyond the entrance.

The buzz of many voices stopped as I appeared.

"Well, son," the Old Man greeted me sternly, "have you carried out your orders?"

I took the pink garment from the towel and held it up.

Cheers resounded throughout the wardroom.

"Gentlemen," said the Captain, "I'm proud to announce that Ensign Lederer has carried his mission to a successful conclusion, as you can see. His courage, resourcefulness, determination and, may I say, good taste, reflect credit upon himself and upon the naval service—."

"Speech! Speech!"

"— And now, perhaps, we can persuade him to tell us just how he obtained such a beautiful and useful piece of apparel. Yes, tell us about it, son."

More cheers.

I hesitated.

"Come on, mister," said Captain Poindexter, "speak up."

"Aw gosh," I said, "there was nothing to it. I just carried out your orders."

Everyone shouted.

"You seen your duty and you done it all right!"

"You can come over to my ship as supply officer any time you want," said one of the skippers laughing and enthusiastically pumping my hand.

"Give us the pitch on your technique."

I didn't know what to do; but here, at least, was my opportunity to show the Old Man that I was cooperative.

I looked at him. He nodded for me to go ahead.

"Well, if you insist," I said, "it was like this. Last night we were driving along the beach—"

I paused for effect.

A half dozen destroyer captains hung on every syllable. I decided to lay it on thick.

"There was a big moon," I continued. "The surf thundered on the beach, and yellow lights twinkled from nearby cottages. The top of the car was down and the summer breeze blew through my companion's hair—."

"Well," laughed someone, "at last we've got the girl in the picture."

Captain Poindexter held up his hand.

"Give him a chance, he'll tell us the story."

The situation worried me. What I had intended as a funny yarn looked as if it might get out of hand. I glanced at my watch; it was three minutes until morning quarters. If I could stall for just that long, then the meeting would break up of its own accord. I continued.

"'What a wonderful night,' my girl said to me, 'let's stop for a while and look at the moon. We have plenty of time.'"

My audience laughed. Only a minute and a half to go until quarters.

"I stopped the car," I went on. "We put our heads back and looked at the big silvery moon. It seemed as if it were about to drop into the ocean—."

"Never mind the build-up," called the heckler. "Let's get down to business. How did you get the drawers?"

"What's the babe's name and telephone number?" asked another.

I bit my lip.

"Go ahead," said Captain Poindexter, "give us the dope on this little rendezvous. You're among shipmates. Let your hair down and tell all."

The wardroom buzzer sounded.

Hopefully I thought that it might be the signal for morning quarters. But no, thirty seconds to go yet. The buzzer gave notice that the squadron commodore (a grand guy, my old instructor at Annapolis) had come aboard. Captain Poindexter made a move to meet him, but before he could reach the passageway the com-

modore descended the ladder leading to the wardroom. Seeing me standing apparently alone in the entrance, he greeted me.

"Good morning, Lederer; hey, didn't I see you driving on the beach about midnight last night with—"

He paused to catch his breath, and everyone in the wardroom nearly fell out of his shoes waiting for the rest of the sentence.

"—with Mrs. Poindexter? That was Mrs. Poindexter, wasn't it?"

I didn't say anything. The blood rushed to my head and I felt like running and hiding in the bilges. The commodore stood there waiting for an answer.

"Yes, sir," I answered, "that was Mrs. Poindexter."

Captain Poindexter opened his mouth a few times but no sound came out.

I twisted my cap in my hands.

Slowly, one by one, the officers from other ships found excuses for leaving. Quarters sounded. Frantically I fumbled through my pockets for the sales slip on the panties. Finally, I found it and thrust it into the Captain's hand. He looked at it for a few seconds and went into his cabin.

He didn't talk much to anyone for a while, and never referred to the incident. Two days later he called me into his cabin.

"Do you still want to go to China?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's all," he said, nodding toward the door.

The following Monday I received despatch orders to report to the Commander-in-Chief, Asiatic Fleet, Shanghai, China.

FREDRIC BROWN

Mouse

BILL WHEELER WAS, as it happened, looking out of the window of his bachelor apartment on the fifth floor on the corner of 83rd Street and Central Park West when the spaceship from Somewhere landed.

It floated gently down out of the sky and came to rest in Central Park on the open grass between the Simon Bolivar Monument and the walk, barely a hundred yards from Bill Wheeler's window.

Bill Wheeler's hand paused in stroking the soft fur of the Siamese cat lying on the windowsill and he said wonderingly, "What's that, Beautiful?" but the Siamese cat didn't answer. She stopped purring, though, when Bill stopped stroking her. She must have felt something different in Bill—possibly from the sudden rigidity in his fingers or possibly because cats are prescient and feel changes of mood. Anyway she rolled over on her back and said, "Miaouw," quite plaintively. But Bill, for once, didn't answer her. He was too engrossed in the incredible thing across the street in the park.

It was cigar-shaped, about seven feet long and two feet in diameter at the thickest point. As far as size was concerned, it might have been a large toy model dirigible, but it never occurred to Bill—even at his first glimpse of it when it was about fifty feet

in the air, just opposite his window—that it might be a toy or a model.

There was something about it, even at the most casual look, that said *alien*. You couldn't put your finger on what it was. Anyway, alien or terrestrial, it had no visible means of support. No wings, propellers, rocket tubes or anything else—and it was made of metal and obviously heavier than air.

But it floated down like a feather to a point just about a foot above the grass. It stopped there and suddenly, out of one end of it (both ends were so nearly alike that you couldn't say it was the front or back) came a flash of fire that was almost blinding. There was a hissing sound with the flash and the cat under Bill Wheeler's hand turned over and was on her feet in a single lithe movement, looking out of the window. She spat once, softly, and the hairs on her back and the back of her neck stood straight up, as did her tail, which was now a full two inches thick.

Bill didn't touch her; if you know cats you don't when they're like that. But he said, "Quiet, Beautiful. It's all right. It's only a spaceship from Mars, to conquer Earth. It isn't a mouse."

He was right on the first count, in a way. He was wrong on the second, in a way. But let's not get ahead of ourselves like that.

After the single blast from its exhaust tube or whatever it was, the spaceship dropped the last twelve inches and lay inert on the grass. It didn't move. There was now a fan-shaped area of blackened earth radiating from one end of it, for a distance of about thirty feet.

And then nothing happened except that people came running from several directions. Cops came running, too, three of them, and kept people from going too close to the alien object. Too close, according to the cops' idea, seemed to be closer than about ten feet. Which, Bill Wheeler thought, was silly. If the thing was going to explode or anything, it would probably kill everyone for blocks around.

But it didn't explode. It just lay there, and nothing happened. Nothing except that flash that had startled both Bill and the cat.

And the cat looked bored now, and lay back down on the windowsill, her hackles down.

Bill stroked her sleek fawn-colored fur again, absentmindedly. He said, "This is a day, Beautiful. That thing out there is from *outside*, or I'm a spider's nephew. I'm going down and take a look at it."

He took the elevator down. He got as far as the front door, tried to open it, and couldn't. All he could see through the glass was the backs of people, jammed tight against the door. Standing on tiptoes and stretching his neck to see over the nearest ones, he could see a solid phalanx of heads stretching from here to there.

He got back in the elevator. The operator said, "Sounds like excitement out front. Parade going by or something?"

"Something," Bill said. "Spaceship just landed in Central Park, from Mars or somewhere. You hear the welcoming committee out there."

"The hell," said the operator. "What's it doing?"

"Nothing."

The operator grinned. "You're a great kidder, Mr. Wheeler. How's that cat you got?"

"Fine," said Bill. "How's yours?"

"Getting crankier. Threw a book at me when I got home last night with a few under my belt and lectured me half the night because I'd spent three and a half bucks. You got the best kind."

"I think so," Bill said.

By the time he got back to the window, there was really a crowd down there. Central Park West was solid with people for half a block each way and the park was solid with them for a long way back. The only open area was a circle around the spaceship, now expanded to about twenty feet in radius, and with a lot of cops keeping it open instead of only three.

Bill Wheeler gently moved the Siamese over to one side of the windowsill and sat down. He said, "We got a box seat, Beautiful. I should have had more sense than to go down there."

The cops below were having a tough time. But reinforcements were coming, truckloads of them. They fought their way into the

circle and then helped enlarge it. Somebody had obviously decided that the larger that circle was the fewer people were going to be killed. A few khaki uniforms had infiltrated the circle, too.

"Brass," Bill told the cat. "High brass. I can't make out insignia from here, but that one boy's at least a three-star; you can tell by the way he walks."

They got the circle pushed back to the sidewalk, finally. There was a lot of brass inside by then. And half a dozen men, some in uniform, some not, were starting, very carefully, to work on the ship. Photographs first, and then measurements, and then one man with a big suitcase of paraphernalia was carefully scratching at the metal and making tests of some kind.

"A metallurgist, Beautiful," Bill Wheeler explained to the Siamese, who wasn't watching at all. "And I'll bet you ten pounds of liver to one miaouw he finds that's an alloy that's brand new to him. And that it's got some stuff in it he can't identify."

"You really ought to be looking out, Beautiful, instead of lying there like a dope. This is a *day*, Beautiful. This may be the beginning of the end—or of something new. I wish they'd hurry up and get it open."

Army trucks were coming into the circle now. Half a dozen big planes were circling overhead, making a lot of noise. Bill looked up at them quizzically.

"Bombers, I'll bet, with pay loads. Don't know what they have in mind unless to bomb the park, people and all, if little green men come out of that thing with ray guns and start killing everybody. Then the bombers could finish off whoever's left."

But no little green men came out of the cylinder. The men working on it couldn't, apparently, find an opening in it. They'd rolled it over now and exposed the under side, but the under side was the same as the top. For all they could tell, the under side *was* the top.

And then Bill Wheeler swore. The army trucks were being unloaded, and sections of a big tent were coming out of them, and men in khaki were driving stakes and unrolling canvas.

"They *would* do something like that, Beautiful," Bill com-

plained bitterly. "Be bad enough if they hauled it off, but to leave it there to work on and still to block off our view—"

The tent went up. Bill Wheeler watched the top of the tent, but nothing happened to the top of the tent and whatever went on inside he couldn't see. Trucks came and went, high brass and civvies came and went.

And after a while the phone rang. Bill gave a last affectionate rumple to the cat's fur and went to answer it.

"Bill Wheeler?" the receiver asked. "This is General Kelly speaking. Your name has been given to me as a competent research biologist. Tops in your field. Is that correct?"

"Well," Bill said. "I'm a research biologist. It would be hardly modest for me to say I'm tops in my field. What's up?"

"A spaceship has just landed in Central Park."

"You don't say," said Bill.

"I'm calling from the field of operations; we've run phones in here, and we're gathering specialists. We would like you and some other biologists to examine something that was found inside the—uh—spaceship. Grimm of Harvard was in town and will be here and Winslow of New York University is already here. It's opposite 83rd Street. How long would it take you to get here?"

"About ten seconds, if I had a parachute. I've been watching you out of my window." He gave the address and the apartment number. "If you can spare a couple of strong boys in imposing uniforms to get me through the crowd, it'll be quicker than if I try it myself. Okay?"

"Right. Send 'em right over. Sit tight."

"Good," said Bill. "*What* did you find inside the cylinder?"

There was a second's hesitation. Then the voice said, "Wait till you get here."

"I've got instruments," Bill said. "Dissecting equipment. Chemicals. Reagents. I want to know what to bring. Is it a little green man?"

"No," said the voice. After a second's hesitation again, it said, "It seems to be a mouse. A dead mouse."

"Thanks," said Bill. He put down the receiver and walked back

to the window. He looked at the Siamese cat accusingly. "Beautiful," he demanded, "was somebody ribbing me, or—"

There was a puzzled frown on his face as he watched the scene across the street. Two policemen came hurrying out of the tent and headed directly for the entrance of his apartment building. They began to work their way through the crowd.

"Fan me with a blowtorch, Beautiful," Bill said. "It's the McCov." He went to the closet and grabbed a valise, hurried to a cabinet and began to stuff instruments and bottles into the valise. He was ready by the time there was a knock on the door.

He said, "Hold the fort, Beautiful. Got to see a man about a mouse." He joined the policemen waiting outside his door and was escorted through the crowd and into the circle of the elect and into the tent.

There was a crowd around the spot where the cylinder lay. Bill peered over shoulders and saw that the cylinder was neatly split in half. The inside was hollow and padded with something that looked like fine leather, but softer. A man kneeling at one end of it was talking.

"—not a trace of any activating mechanism, any mechanism at *all*, in fact. Not a wire, not a grain or a drop of any fuel. Just a hollow cylinder, padded inside. Gentlemen, it *couldn't* have traveled by its own power in any conceivable way. But it came here, and from outside. Gravesend says the material is definitely extraterrestrial. Gentlemen, I'm stumped."

Another voice said, "I've an idea, Major." It was the voice of the man over whose shoulder Bill Wheeler was leaning and Bill recognized the voice and the man with a start. It was the Governor of New York. Bill quit leaning on him.

"I'm no scientist," the Governor said. "And this is just a possibility. Remember the one blast, out of that single exhaust hole? That might have been the destruction, the dissipation of whatever the mechanism or the propellant was. Whoever, whatever, sent or guided this contraption might not have wanted us to find out what made it run. It was constructed, in that case, so that, upon landing, the mechanism destroyed itself utterly. Colonel Roberts,

you examined that scorched area of ground. Anything that might bear out that theory?"

"Definitely, sir," said another voice. "Traces of metal and silica and some carbon, as though it had been vaporized by terrific heat and then condensed and uniformly spread. You can't find a chunk of it to pick up, but the instruments indicate it. Another thing—"

Someone tapped Bill Wheeler on the shoulder. "You're Wheeler, aren't you?"

Bill turned. "Professor Winslow!" he said. "I've seen your picture, sir, and I've read your papers in the Journal. I'm proud to meet you and to—"

"Cut the malarkey," said Professor Winslow, "and take a gander at this." He grabbed Bill Wheeler by the arm and led him to a table in one corner of the tent.

"Looks for all the world like a dead mouse," he said, "but it isn't. Not quite. I haven't cut in yet; waited for you and Grimm. But I've taken temperature tests and had hairs under the mike and studied musculature. It's—well, look for yourself."

Bill Wheeler looked. It looked like a mouse all right, a very small mouse, until you looked closely. Then you saw little differences, if you were a biologist.

Grimm got there and—delicately, reverently—they cut in. The differences stopped being little ones and became big ones. The bones didn't seem to be made of bone, for one thing, and they were bright yellow instead of white. The digestive system wasn't too far off the beam, and there was a circulatory system and a white milky fluid in it, but there wasn't any heart. There were, instead, nodes at regular intervals along the larger tubes.

"Way stations," Grimm said. "No central pump. You might call it a lot of little hearts instead of one big one. Efficient, I'd say. Creature built like this couldn't have heart trouble. Here, let me put some of that white fluid on a slide."

Someone was leaning over Bill's shoulder, putting uncomfortable weight on him. He turned his head to tell the man to get the hell away and saw it was the Governor of New York. "Out of this world?" the Governor asked quietly.

"And how," said Bill. A second later he added, "Sir," and the Governor chuckled. He asked, "Would you say it's been dead long or that it died about the time of arrival?"

Winslow answered that one. "It's purely a guess because we don't know the chemical make-up of the thing, or what its normal temperature is. But a rectal thermometer reading twenty minutes ago, when I got here, was ninety-five three and one minute ago it was ninety point six. At that rate of heat loss, it couldn't have been dead long."

"Would you say it was an intelligent creature?"

"I wouldn't say for sure, Sir. It's too alien. But I'd guess—definitely no. No more so than its terrestrial counterpart, a mouse. Brain size and convolutions are quite similar."

"You don't think it could, conceivably, have designed that ship?"

"I'd bet a million to one against it, Sir."

It had been mid-afternoon when the spaceship had landed; it was almost midnight when Bill Wheeler started home. Not from across the street, but from the lab at New York U., where the dissection and microscopic examinations had continued.

He walked home in a daze, but he remembered guiltily that the Siamese hadn't been fed, and hurried as much as he could for the last block.

She looked at him reproachfully and said, "Miaouw, miaouw, miaouw, miaouw—" so fast he couldn't get a word in edgewise until she was eating some liver out of the icebox.

"Sorry, Beautiful," he said then. "Sorry, too, I couldn't bring you that mouse, but they wouldn't have let me if I'd asked, and I didn't ask because it would probably have given you indigestion."

He was still so excited that he couldn't sleep that night. When it got early enough he hurried out for the morning papers to see if there had been any new discoveries or developments.

There hadn't been. There was less in the papers than he knew already. But it was a big story and the papers played it big.

He spent most of three days at the New York U. lab, helping with further tests and examinations until there just weren't any new ones to try and darn little left to try them on. Then the gov-

ernment took over what was left and Bill Wheeler was on the outside again.

For three more days he stayed home, tuned in on all news reports on the radio and video and subscribed to every newspaper published in English in New York City. But the story gradually died down. Nothing further happened; no further discoveries were made and if any new ideas developed, they weren't given out for public consumption.

It was on the sixth day that an even bigger story broke—the assassination of the President of the United States. People forgot the spaceship.

Two days later the prime minister of Great Britain was killed by a Spaniard and the day after that a minor employee of the Politburo in Moscow ran amok and shot a very important official.

A lot of windows broke in New York City the next day when a goodly portion of a county in Pennsylvania went up fast and came down slowly. No one within several hundred miles needed to be told that there was—or had been—a dump of A-bombs there. It was in sparsely populated country and not many people were killed, only a few thousand.

That was the afternoon, too, that the president of the stock exchange cut his throat and the crash started. Nobody paid too much attention to the riot at Lake Success the next day because of the unidentified submarine fleet that suddenly sank practically all the shipping in New Orleans harbor.

It was the evening of that day that Bill Wheeler was pacing up and down the front room of his apartment. Occasionally he stopped at the window to pet the Siamese named Beautiful and to look out across Central Park, bright under lights and cordoned off by armed sentries, where they were pouring concrete for the anti-aircraft gun emplacements.

He looked haggard.

He said, "Beautiful, we saw the start of it, right from this window. Maybe I'm crazy, but I still think that spaceship started it. God knows how. Maybe I should have fed you that mouse. Things couldn't have gone to pot so *suddenly* without help from somebody or something."

He shook his head slowly. "Let's dope it out, Beautiful. Let's say something came in on that ship besides a dead mouse. What could it have been? What could it have done and be doing?"

"Let's say that the mouse was a laboratory animal, a guinea pig. It was sent in the ship and it survived the journey but died when it got here. Why? I've got a screwy hunch, Beautiful."

He sat down in a chair and leaned back, staring up at the ceiling. He said, "Suppose the superior intelligence—from Somewhere—that made that ship came in with it. Suppose it wasn't the mouse—let's call it a mouse. Then, since the mouse was the only physical thing in the spaceship, the being, the invader, wasn't physical. It was an entity that could live apart from whatever body it had back where it came from. But let's say it could live in *any* body and it left its own in a safe place back home and rode here in one that was expendable, that it could abandon on arrival. That would explain the mouse and the fact that it died at the time the ship landed.

"Then the *being*, at that instant, just jumped into the body of someone here—probably one of the first people to run toward the ship when it landed. It's living in somebody's body—in a hotel on Broadway or a flophouse on the Bowery or anywhere—pretending to be a human being. That make sense, Beautiful?"

He got up and started to pace again.

"And having the ability to control other minds, it sets about to make the world—the Earth—safe for Martians or Venusians or whatever they are. It sees—after a few days of study—that the world is on the brink of destroying itself and needs only a push. So it could give that push.

"It could get inside a nut and make him assassinate the President, and get caught at it. It could make a Russian shoot his Number 1. It could make a Spaniard shoot the prime minister of England. It could start a bloody riot in the U. N., and make an army man, there to guard it, explode an A-bomb dump. It could—hell, Beautiful, it could push this world into a final war within a week. It practically *has* done it."

He walked over to the window and stroked the cat's sleek fur

while he frowned down at the gun emplacements going up under the bright floodlights.

"And he's done it and even if my guess is right I couldn't stop him because I couldn't find him. And nobody would believe me, now. He'll make the world safe for Martians. When the war is over, a lot of little ships like that—or big ones—can land here and take over what's left ten times as easy as they could now."

He lighted a cigarette, with hands that shook a little. He said, "The more I think of it, the more—"

He sat down in the chair again. He said, "Beautiful, I've got to *try*. Screwy as that idea is, I've got to give it to the authorities, whether they believe it or not. That Major I met was an intelligent guy. So is General Kelly. I—"

He started to walk to the phone and then sat down again. "I'll call both of them, but let's work it out just a little finer first. See if I can make any intelligent suggestions how they could go about finding the—the *being*—"

He groaned. "Beautiful, it's impossible. It wouldn't even have to be a human being. It could be an animal, anything. It could be you. He'd probably take over whatever nearby type of mind was nearest his own. If he was remotely feline, you'd have been the nearest cat."

He sat up and stared at her. He said, "I'm going crazy, Beautiful. I'm remembering how you jumped and twisted just after that spaceship blew up its mechanism and went inert. And, listen, Beautiful, you've been sleeping twice as much as usual lately. Has your mind been out—"

"Say, *that* would be why I couldn't wake you up yesterday to feed you. Beautiful, cats always wake up easily. *Cats* do."

Looking dazed, Bill Wheeler got up out of the chair. He said, "Cat, *am* I crazy, or—"

The Siamese cat looked at him languidly through sleepy eyes. Distinctly it said, "*Forget it.*"

And halfway between sitting and rising, Bill Wheeler looked even more dazed for a second. He shook his head as though to clear it.

He said, "What was I talking about, Beautiful? I'm getting punchy from not enough sleep."

He walked over to the window and stared out, gloomily, rubbing the cat's fur until it purred.

He said, "Hungry, Beautiful? Want some liver?"

The cat jumped down from the windowsill and rubbed itself against his leg affectionately.

It said, "Miaouw."

Across the Nation



In New York

**The Waldorf-Astoria
The Plaza
The Roosevelt**

In Chicago

**The Conrad Hilton
Palmer House**

In Washington, D. C.

The Mayflower

In Los Angeles

The Town House

In St. Louis, Mo.

The Jefferson

In Dayton, Ohio

The Dayton Biltmore

In Fort Worth, El Paso, Texas

The Hilton Hotel

In Albuquerque, N. M.

The Hilton Hotel

In San Bernardino, Calif.

Arrowhead Springs

In San Juan, Puerto Rico

The Caribe Hilton

In Chihuahua, Mexico

The Palacio Hilton



Conrad N. Hilton, President

EXECUTIVE OFFICES • THE CONRAD HILTON • CHICAGO 5, ILLINOIS

Use our Inter-Hotel Reservation Service or teletype your nearest Hilton Hotel